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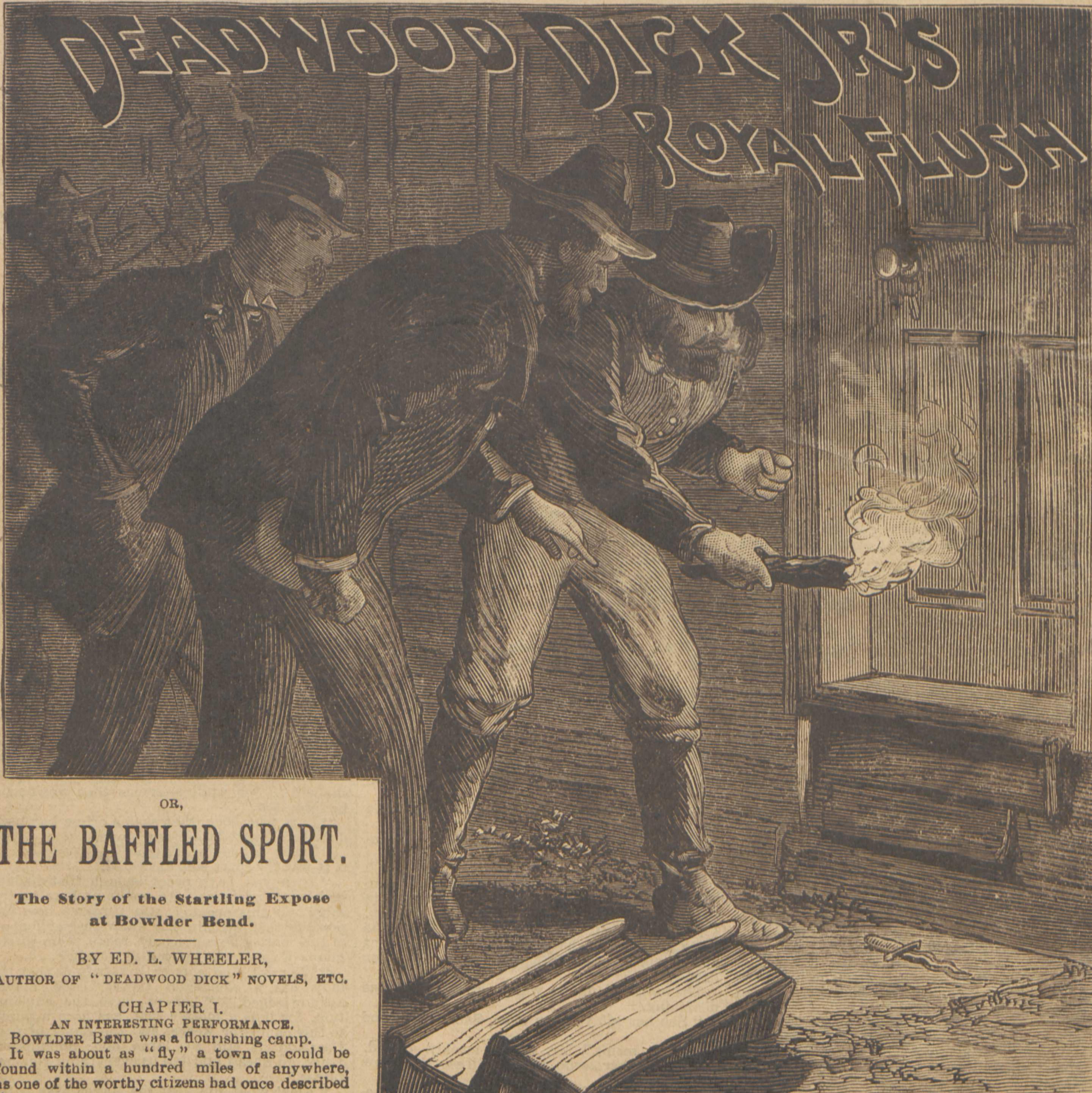
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OR, THE BAFFLED SPORT.

The Story of the Startling Expose
at Bowlder Bend.

BY ED. L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

AN INTERESTING PERFORMANCE.
BOWLDER BEND was a flourishing camp. It was about as "fly" a town as could be found within a hundred miles of anywhere, as one of the worthy citizens had once described it.

There were some popular saloons, the chief of which was the "Old Rye," run by one Kris

THERE LAY UPON THE GROUND A DAGGER, A PECULIAR, DREAD-LOOKING WEAPON, WITH A ROUND, SERPENTINE BLADE, A WEAPON ONCE SEEN NEVER TO BE FORGOTTEN.

Karples, a ponderous, jolly Teuton with a face as round and beaming as the full moon.

Besides these there were a big hotel, a couple of stores of the better sort, and shanties in plenty; the latter bespeaking a goodly population.

And, a goodly population Bowler Bend had.

On the main street the buildings stood shoulder to shoulder, with barely passage room between them anywhere, and the signs upon them were of every size and kind, from the commonest shingle to the most gorgeous full front display.

It was an evening, and the street just mentioned was fairly ablaze with electric lights. It was crowded with miners who had come in from the surrounding diggings, together with the men and women of the camp; music was on the breeze; and, taken all in all, the place seemed to be making ready for a lively night.

On the north side of the street, at a point where the electric lights had the appearance of being brighter than elsewhere, and where they certainly were more numerous, gleamed and sparkled the big transparency sign of the Old Rye; and it was from this saloon that the loudest music emanated.

On either side of the wide double entrance was a billboard, with flaming posters setting forth the manner of entertainment to be found within.

The Old Rye had a stage of no mean dimensions for a mining-camp, and gave a performance of one kind or another every night in the week, Sundays included. On that evening it was a "Sacred Concert," though there was nothing sacred about it but the name.

On this occasion it was something new, as the posters revealed, and a big patronage was pouring into the saloon.

The posters read like this:

"MONS. AND MME. ARNAULD,
GREAT FRENCH MIMICS AND MIND-READERS;
IN THEIR ARTISTIC CHARACTER PERSONATIONS.
AMAZING FEATS OF MIND READING.
HOW IS IT DONE?
COME AND SEE!"

And this being, as said, something new, the crowd poured into the Old Rye in response to the invitation, to learn what it was and how it was done; though that little mattered to most of them, since they simply sought entertainment.

The big proprietor was behind his bar, smiling and happy, and a great crowd seated before the stage was eager to see the curtain roll up and the performance commence. They had already begun to whistle, stamp and cat-call, and the time was almost at hand when the performance was announced to begin.

"Well, Kris, what have ye got here to-night?" asked one man, as he stopped at the bar before seeking a seat.

"Pless me if I know v'at id is, Mister Dunn," was the response. "But, you can pooty gwick made oop your mind id vas somedings pooty nice, to be in mine saloon."

"How do you know how nice it is, Kris, if you don't know what it is?" the man argued.

"Vell, id vas pooty nice, anyhow, I bet you id vas."

Mayor Dunn set down his empty glass with a smile, and went forward and took a seat with the crowd.

In a few minutes the curtain went up, disclosing a man and woman on the stage in evening costumes.

Both bowed, and the man stepped forward, saying, with a slight accent:

"Ladies and Gentlemen:—It is with pleasure we appear before you this evening for the purpose of entertaining you for a little while. The first half of our performance will be given to character changes, which will be made in open sight before you all. Then will be shown the wonderful power of mind-reading possessed by Madame Arnauld. This, I am sure, will interest everybody. Now, for our first change, in which you will behold us as the priest and penitent."

He stepped back to a table which occupied the middle of the stage, and on which were spread such things as they would use.

Some hasty changes in appearance were made by both, and in a moment the gay Frenchman had been changed into a sober and solemn priest, while his wife was at his feet a sorrowing suppliant.

Cheering greeted the picture.

From that, change after change followed in rapid succession, every possible character being

assumed by both, until the identity of the performers as they had at first appeared had become completely and bewilderingly lost.

After the final change, when they appeared again as at first, the applause was long and loud.

The table was now pushed back out of the way and the woman took her seat on a chair that was placed for her, the man then tightly blindfolding her.

"Now," he said, to the audience, "madame will show her wonderful powers. You can see how impossible it must be for her to see anything. If any doubt this, now is the time to satisfy yourselves. Come right up and examine."

No one accepted the invitation, taking the man's word for it. But, it was plain to be seen there was no deception about this part of the performance.

"In the first place," the man spoke again, after a little pause, "I will go down and pass among you, and you may give me any article you please. I will ask madam what it is, and without seeing it she will describe it to you. You doubt it? Very well, let it be put to the test."

He stepped down from the stage, his hand held out to receive anything that might be given him.

"Hyer, pard, take this," one man sung out.

He held the object covered, whatever it was, as he extended it to the performer, who received it in like manner.

Without hesitation the performer asked the mind-reader what the article was, and as promptly she gave the answer, both speaking plainly in English:

"It is a pipe monsieur holds in his hand."

"A pipe it is," the Frenchman cried, holding it up so that all might see.

"Wal, I'm blowed!" exclaimed the miner.

"Give'er a try on this hyer," another fellow invited.

He surrendered something to the Frenchman, and the question was put as readily as before.

The answer was as prompt:

"It is now a knife monsieur holds."

A knife it was, and it was held up so that all might see the answer was correct.

This was repeated time after time till over twenty different articles had been passed upon, and that without a single mistake, though some of them were things not easily guessed.

It was a performance in which everybody was interested.

"We will now vary the performance a little," the Frenchman said, after some further displays had been made. "I will pass among you again, laying my hand upon a man here and there, and madam will immediately mention his name and make a few brief statements concerning him. Madam will please turn her back to the audience and so make it doubly impossible for her to see."

The woman rose and turned her chair around, resuming her seat with her back to the crowd.

The Frenchman then passed down the room, and after looking around for a moment, as if to make a suitable selection, laid his hand on the shoulder of the mayor of the camp.

"Whom do I touch?" he asked.

"The gentleman is Gilmore Dunn," was the prompt answer. "He is mayor of the place. He is a man well-liked, but one to be feared by his foes. Connected with him in my mind is the face of a beautiful girl. It is his daughter, I am sure."

"That is the kind of a gal Gil's is," one fellow sung out.

"Yas, an' that 'ar is jest ther sort of a man he is, too, and don't ye forget et," added another.

"A pretty close strike, that's the fact," the mayor himself admitted.

With a bow the Frenchman passed on to another.

"Who is this?" he asked.

"The gentleman is Samuel Seems," was the immediate reply. "His face is accompanied in my mind by that of an angry-looking woman. I think Monsieur Seems had better go home early to-night, if he would avoid unpleasant consequences. Madam will take no poor excuses."

The howl of laughter which greeted that was deafening.

"She has hit ye darn close, Sam," cried one man.

"So et seems," Mr. Seems meekly agreed. "But, all ther same, I guess I'll see the show out 'fore I go."

Several other tests were made, the answer being correct in every instance, and presently the last one was reached, in that line.

"Tell me who this is, madam," the Frenchman requested, "and I will ask you for no more names."

As he spoke he laid a hand on the shoulder of a rather sportish-looking man who sat near Mayor Dunn—a good-looking, well-dressed fellow of thirty or thereabouts.

"The gentleman is Barlow Gobert," was the prompt reply. "He is a—a—what you call sport. With him I see the face of a lady, not very distinctly. She is not here, but a long way distant. It is his wife—"

"Nonsense!" the sport ejaculated, though his face flushed red.

Many eyes were turned upon him, and those of Mayor Dunn searched his face with a look of keenest inquiry.

"And I see another face," the woman on the stage added. "It is the face of a rare and beautiful— Ha! it is the daughter of the mayor! Ah! what more do I see? Yes, yes! I must say it! Let the maiden beware, oh, let her beware; for, I see her upon the very brink of shame and ruin!"

The sport was now upon his feet, his face having paled.

"This is worse than nonsense!" he cried. "If she claims to see a wife in my case, she lies; that's plain English."

"Let monsieur have a care!" cautioned Professor Arnauld. "The madman never is mistaken in what she reads. If anything unpleasant has been disclosed, we humbly beg pardon, it was not our fault."

"You thought the performance immense till it came to this," reminded the mayor, somewhat warmly.

"In my own case I can see what a humbug it is, that's the difference."

"Well, well, we will let it pass," the performer hastened to pacify. "We will turn now to the last and most difficult test of all. Monsieur the Mayor may, if it please him, ask two questions, not out aloud, but in his mind, and the lady will at once give him the answer to them. If he doubts me let him test it."

"I'll do it!" the mayor quietly assented.

CHAPTER II.

A MATTER OF MYSTERY.

NEEDLESS to say, this created interest anew. Was it possible for any mortal to perform such feat as was now promised?

The crowd became quiet, and for the space of a moment no one spoke, all waiting for the woman on the stage to be the first to do so.

She did not long delay.

"I read the question of Monsieur the Mayor," she announced, speaking clearly and distinctly, her slight accent lending a charm to her words. "The first question I will not speak aloud, for reasons which Monsieur the Mayor can understand, but I will give him the answer he seeks. Yes, monsieur, beware! Such is my answer. And now for the second question.

"Monsieur the Mayor has asked me in his mind to explain the mystery of a murder that was committed here some weeks ago, as well as to point out the murderer so he may be brought to justice. Am I not right, monsieur?"

"By heavens, you are!" the astonished mayor exclaimed.

"Has she hit both questions, boss?" one man eagerly inquired.

"Yes, she has," the mayor averred. "Her answer to the first fits close, and the second is right to a T, proving that she knows what she is talkin' about."

"Then let us have the answer to the second, by all means," urged Barlow Gobert, the sport. "If she can tell us who killed Harry Deerland, she will do the camp a service that won't soon be forgotten."

"It is true, then, that such a crime has been done here?" asked the Frenchman.

"True? Of course it's true."

It was the sport who answered.

"Then you have proof enough that madam makes no mistakes. As we came here by the stage only this evening, you perceive how impossible that madam can know the particulars of this matter, except as she reads them in the minds of those who know all about it."

"We have seen enough to satisfy us that the lady has a wonderful power," the mayor acknowledged. "Let us have the explanation, for it is a matter that has been a puzzle to this camp for weeks, and the slayer of poor Deerland is still at large and unpunished. Lady, go ahead and tell us everything you can, please."

"Alas! what Monsieur the Mayor asks is impossible."

"Impossible! Do ye mean to say you are

stumped—that is, that you can't explain it, after all?"

"No, no; not so, monsieur; but, in the mind of the guilty one I read murder anew, and it were all my life is worth for me to breathe his name. I dare not do it, monsieur; no, I dare not tell!"

"Then you know who the cuss is?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Is he present in this room?"

"That I must refuse to answer. He threatens me if I do."

"But, by heavens, woman, we must know!" cried the mayor, excitedly. "If you have this secret you must disclose it to us."

"No, no; it is impossible, sir. I dare not do it. The lives of my husband and myself would be the sacrifice, were I to do so. No; my lips must remain sealed."

"It will never do, woman," urged Barlow Gobert. "If you have the knowledge you profess to have, you must impart it to us, so that the crime can be avenged. You need not fear; this camp will protect you."

"No, no; do not urge me," the woman protested.

"It must be as madam decides," spoke up the Frenchman. "Reading the human mind as she does, and peering into the future as it were, she understands that such protection as you offer would be of no avail. She must not be urged to make the disclosure."

"But, you promised that my questions should be answered," the mayor persisted.

"True, monsieur; but, who could guess what your questions would involve?"

"That was not made a condition, sir."

"It ought to have been; but, had we named it as such, you would have accused us of trickery and have pronounced our supreme test only a sham. As it is, you cannot deny the proofs you have seen."

"We have seen no proofs yet, though, Frenchy," sung out some one in the audience.

"Not seen the proofs? Has not Monsieur the Mayor acknowledged that madam was right in reading his questions as she did?"

"Yas, that's so; but, he wanted the mystery explained. Can't ye fell us somethin' 'bout ther murder, even if ye don't tell us who done it?"

"Let madam decide," and the Frenchman thus referred the matter to the lady.

"I suppose I may make some general statements about the crime," the woman immediately spoke up, "so long as I make no disclosures which will endanger me at the hands of the murderer. Doing this, I will be answering in a way the first part of monsieur's question."

"Well, do that, then," the mayor urged.

"With much pleasure, monsieur. Since you asked the question my mind has been fixed upon the matter, and the whole terrible scene has been enacted again before my mental vision. Would that I could tell you all, but that is impossible, for the reason you have heard. For my life I dare not disclose it."

"On the night of the eleventh of last month Harry Deerland was murdered, and to you the whole affair has been a deep mystery. Monsieur Deerland was a young man, and a favorite in the camp, though he had not been here a great while. He had no enemy here, so far as known to you, and the conclusion arrived at was that some enemy from elsewhere followed him, secretly, and dealt the deadly blow and escaped."

"Deerland was employed at the office of the Cadet Mine, and slept in a room adjoining the office, which he had fitted up as a bedroom. This arrangement he made in order to be near the safe, and so in a way to act the part of watchman over the valuables for which he was accountable to the company. It was in this room he was killed, being stabbed by a blade of curious shape, as the wound proved, though the weapon itself was not found. The assassin had entered through the office, where a hole in a pane of glass in one of the rear windows disclosed the means. The safe had not been tampered with."

"Such is the case as you know it, and the fact that the safe was left untouched is your proof that only vengeance against the young man was the object of the breaking in. And, you are right in that. I dare say no more than this about it. I see the assassin enter; I see him go noiselessly to the room where his victim sleeps; I see him bend over him for a moment, and then he strikes the deadly blow. How careful he is not to get a drop of blood upon his person, too! He waits a little; then he withdraws the deadly weapon, wipes it hastily upon the covers, and glides out the way he came. He does not dare retain the weapon, and casts it about for a hiding-place for it. It is at

hand. He slips it under the box stoop by the rear door, and glides away."

"More! More! Tell us more!"

So yelled the crowd now, wild with awakened interest.

"No, I dare tell no word more," the Frenchwoman made answer. "It were death to do so!"

The woman had now risen from the chair, and her husband hastened to the stage and removed the bandage from her eyes, when both made a bow together and retired as the curtain was run down.

The performance was done, and the crowd was at liberty.

"Mayor, what do you think of this wild work, anyhow?" demanded Sport Gobert, as they left their seats.

"It beats anything I ever witnessed," was the mayor's prompt answer. "I am going to put faith in what the woman disclosed to me, too."

"She did not disclose very much, it seemed to me."

"She answered my first question right up prompt, anyhow."

"I had forgotten that one; I was thinking only about the murder mystery. Do you really believe she knows as much as she claims to know?"

"It looks as though she does, anyhow, by what we have seen and heard. But, I am going to put her story to the proof and see what will come of it."

"You are going to look under the step at the office for the missing knife?"

"That is it; you have guessed it the first time."

"Just what I was going to propose to you, Mr. Dunn. Let's get torches and go there immediately."

"Come on!"

Kris Karples, the proprietor, soon supplied their want for lights, and the mayor and the sport set out, followed by several of the crowd, who bore the torches.

Coming to the mine office, they passed around behind and stopped at the rear door, where the mayor at once laid hold upon the steps and removed the box bodily from the spot it occupied.

No sooner had the box been lifted than ejaculations sprung from the lips of all.

There lay upon the ground a dagger, a peculiar, dread-looking weapon with a round, serpentine blade; a weapon once seen never to be forgotten.

For a moment all gazed in astonishment at this tell-tale blade, then Barlow Gobert stooped and picked it up.

"Well, what do you think now?" demanded the mayor.

"I think that woman must be akin to Satan," was the answer.

"What have ye found?" demanded those of the crowd who were too far back to see what the discovery had been.

"Has any man among you ever seen this weapon before?" demanded the sport as he held the knife up to view. "It is undoubtedly the dagger that killed poor Deerland."

No one had seen the dagger before.

"Well, we have found it, just where the woman said the murderer put it," the mayor observed, "and it is the best of proof that she was no humbug."

"Unless—but the sport caught himself."

"What?" the mayor demanded. "Unless what, Gobert?"

"Why, it's only a thought that came to me, and I came near to letting it out. Perhaps I had better not mention it."

"Out with it, if it is anything that may throw light upon this accursed mystery."

"Well, I was on the point of saying—Unless the woman knew something about the crime herself," the sport explained.

"That's what's ther matter!" cried one of the men. "How did ther woman know ther weepin war hyer? These hyer ain't the days o' sights an' seers no more."

"And you say that in spite of what you have just seen of her skill?" asked the mayor. "How was she able to tell what I was thinking about, when I hadn't opened my lips? Answer me that if you can."

"Well, that 'ar's so, boss, come ter think about et."

CHAPTER III.

AND MORE MYSTERY STILL.

AFTER some little debate the step was put back into place, and the party with their find returned to the Old Rye.

There the matter was discussed at length, any-

body and everybody taking part who felt inclined to do so, and gradually the crowd became divided into parties with differing opinions.

Each individual had arrayed himself with that leader whose argument was nearest in accord with the individual's own ideas, or to whose cause he had been converted by the force of the leader's logic; and of these parties there were two that were about equally numbered.

At the head of one party, Mayor Dunn was firmly of the opinion that the Frenchwoman was a seer, who could, if she would, reveal the name of the assassin to them; but who, being a prophet, was able to foresee the danger of so doing, if not indeed the certainty of death at the hand of the assassin if she exposed him thus. And, much sympathy was felt for her in consequence.

On the other hand, Barlow Gobert, the sport, took the stand that, whatever the woman knew, she should be made to tell it, the camp standing in her defense against any harm that might threaten her. If she had such power, he argued, she ought to exercise it in the cause of justice; for, otherwise, would she not be, in law, an accessory after the fact? He thought so; and he, for one, was eager to have the truth out. And so were his following.

Then, there was the usual respectable minority, who, having taken up the hint dropped by the sport at the time of the finding of the dagger, were inclined to believe the French couple had had some part in the crime, to possess such knowledge concerning it. But, these were few in number, comparatively.

The leader of the last-named party, or at any rate one of its champions, was the proprietor of the saloon, Kris Karples.

"Well, what are we going to do about it?" the mayor finally demanded. "That is the question."

"I am for having it out," declared the sport.

"We can guard them from harm, and there is no reason why the woman should not tell what she knows."

"Dot's what der matter vas, maype," chipped in the rotund Teuton. "I am in favor of takin' out a red-hot writ of habus corpus und lockin' 'em oop in der bost-office, py dunder!"

"Mayor, will you let me offer a suggestion?"

The speaker was a young man, one who had thus far had little to say.

"Why, certainly, Cy Morton, say whatever you want to say," the mayor answered him.

"Well, it is only a suggestion that has come to me. Why not send for Mr. Roefling and advise with him about it?"

"That ain't a bad idea," the mayor agreed.

"It is just the thing," supported Gobert. "I'll bet he will agree with me in my view of the case."

"Yaw, dot's what's der matter, I bet you," chimed in the proprietor. "He is der uncle mit der deadt man, und he vill pooty gwick told you all apoudt id, you bet me he vill."

"Well, let somebody go for him, then," the mayor directed.

Benjamin Roefling was manager of the Cadet Mine, and Harry Deerland, the murdered young man, had been his nephew.

He was a man past middle age, of very staid and sober character, and was seldom out of the hotel at night, unless some very unusual excitement in the camp tempted him.

In obedience to the mayor's order, a couple of men set out to bring the mine-manager to the saloon, it being only a few steps distant from the hotel.

They presently returned, the old man with them.

"What's this I am told, Dunn?" he immediately demanded, "Is there some hope of getting a clue to the murderer of poor Harry?"

"I can't say whether there is or not, sir, and for that reason I sent for you, to ask you what ought to be done about it. I will give you the facts in a few words, and you will understand."

The matter was soon made known.

"We'll have it out of her, certainly," the manager cried. "We'll appoint a bodyguard of twenty men to protect her, if necessary, but we must have the facts at any cost. Come on to the hotel, and we'll compel her to disclose what she is holding back from us."

With that, the mine-manager turned and left the place, the mayor and others following him.

They went immediately to the Queen Anne—the name of the hotel, and the manager asked:

"Have that showman and his wife retired yet?"

"I guess they have, sir," answered the clerk.

"Well, send up and see, quick, and tell them the mayor of the camp must see them at once."

The clerk made haste to comply, and in a few moments word was brought that the couple had

retired for the night, and begged to be excused till morning.

"What shall we do about it, mayor?" demanded Roefling.

"Don't see what we can do, but wait till morning, Mr. Roefling."

"We have the power and the authority to make them get up, however, and have it out with them now."

"That's true; but it's a little harsh on the woman," spoke up Gobert. "If both were men I would say bring them down in a hurry; but, as it is—"

"You are in favor of being easy with them, eh?"

"Well, yes; much as I am in favor of forcing them to disclose what they know, I would say do not push them too hard. We can afford to wait until morning, particularly as the hour is getting late."

So, after further debate, it was decided.

Next morning they were on hand early to carry out the programme, their course of acting having been fully decided upon.

The French couple were not up, however, and after waiting until such time as they certainly ought to be astir, word was sent to their room that a committee desired to wait upon them.

What was the amazement when word was brought that they were gone!

"Gone!" cried the mayor.

"Bag and baggage," assured the clerk. "Here's something they left behind for your enlightenment."

He gave the mayor a sheet of paper as he spoke, and every person in the room pressed forward eager to learn the message the paper contained.

The mayor read as follows:

"To MONSIEUR THE MAYOR:—

"Pardon, monsieur. Our safety is in flight. Madam has been threatened. If we remain, she must tell and die. You would force it so. By going away, she keeps the secret and we live. We deeply regret that we became entangled in such a dilemma. Your pardon, monsieur, we crave."

"M. ARNAULD."

"This beats the deuce," the mayor cried.

"You are right it does," agreed Gobert.

"When did they go?" demanded Roefling.

"The bed has not been occupied, sir," said the clerk.

"Then, confound them, they got out of the camp before midnight, probably, and they lied to us when they said they were in bed."

"Dot's what's der matter, py dunder!" cried Kris Karples, who was on hand to see and hear, being in no haste to open his resort in the forenoon. "You can yust put id in your pipes und smoke id all to bieces, what dot vromans had somedings to do mit der murder; ain't id?"

"It begins to look as if you are more than half right, Kris," agreed the sport, impressed.

"Let's go up to the room, and see if anything further is to be discovered," suggested Benjamin Roefling.

"Come on," cried the mayor. "I'm kicking myself, now, that I did not push the matter last night, regardless of everything."

"Id vas enough to make a shackass kick himself, py dunder id vas!" cried the excited Teuton. "I nefer felt so mooth like kicking mine own self as l do yust now."

Led by the clerk, they made their way up to the room the French couple had engaged, some half a dozen of them, all told; and a thorough search of the apartment was immediately begun.

Soon Barlow Gobert uttered an ejaculation. He had stooped behind a big chair, and as he rose he held an object up to view.

It was the sheath of a dagger, a leather affair, tipped with what looked to be German silver, and at sight of it all the others gave vent to exclamations.

The sheath was crooked in form, that is, of serpentine shape, and it was instantly recognized as the cover to the very dagger that had taken the life of Harry Deerland.

No wonder that excitement prevailed.

"Where did you find it?" cried mine-manager Roefling.

"Right here behind the chair, where I just picked it up, sir."

"Py dunder! what I told you, anyhow?" cried the Teuton. "Ain't id I vas made a pooty goot guess, maybe?"

"It does begin to look rather unfavorable for the couple, that's the fact," the mayor averred. "That looks like the case that held the crooked dagger."

"I don't see how there can be any doubt on that point," offered Cyrus Morton, the young man who, on the previous night, had first pro-

posed laying the matter then under debate before the mine-manager.

He was a young man, under thirty, and was in the employ of the mine, filling the position which had been made vacant by the death of Deerland.

"And, it having been found here," reasoned Gobert, "the appearance of the case is dark against the couple. It does not appear so strange, now, that the woman was able to tell where the dagger was hid."

"You are right, there," the manager coincided.

"Yust what I said from der onces—from der gwick—I mean from der first," Karples reminded.

"But, how did they get away? Where have they gone to?"

"Who can answer that?"

Further search revealed nothing more of importance in the room, and the men withdrew, still discussing the mystery.

Every inquiry was made, to learn something about the missing couple, but no one had seen them after they entered the hotel upon the close of the performance at the Old Rye.

The manner of their going was truly a mystery, and now everybody regretted that they had not been held when the first breath of suspicion arose against them. It might now prove a difficult matter to find them, or to learn anything of their whereabouts. The mayor blamed himself for their escape—as it was looked upon.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAYOR'S PLAIN TALK.

A COUPLE of hours later the Mayor of Bowler Bend was seated in his office in a brown study, alone.

On the desk before him, side by side, lay the dagger with which, as there was every reason to believe, Harry Deerland had been killed, and the sheath which belonged to it.

For half an hour or longer he had scarcely moved, while his mind had been busy trying to penetrate the mystery of the tragedy.

Presently a step on the stoop, and a shadow in the doorway caused him to look up.

The intruder was Barlow Gobert, the sport.

"Well, have you been able to solve it yet?" he made inquiry, seeing how the mayor was engaged.

"No; and am not likely to, either," was the response. "It is plain enough that I was never cut out for a detective, Gobert."

"There is every indication that my chance suspicion against the Frenchwoman was not far from the truth. If we had only made sure of her when she was yet within reach—But, that's past."

"Yes; worse luck. We ought to have held on to her at all hazards."

"You think she was guilty?"

"Blame me if I know what to make of her, Gobert. She's a worse mystery than the murderer itself, if possible."

"She knew something about it, you may depend on it. That was made plain by her disclosing where the dagger was to be found. And then the finding of this sheath where we did—"

"It is strange—more than strange. I have been trying in vain to grasp it, but my mind is not equal to it."

"Well, suppose you give it up for the present, then. I have dropped in for a talk upon another matter."

"I may as well give it up, not only for the present but for all time."

The mayor took up the dagger, drove the blade spitefully into the sheath, and dropped it into a drawer of his desk.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"I will not ask you to guess, mayor, though I am sure you do. It is about Tessie that I have called—"

"You might as well have remained away, then," the mayor interrupted in a determined manner. "I have made up my mind that you are not the man I would have my girl marry."

"But, what has she to say about it?"

"I haven't asked her."

"Then you have not kept your word with me. You promised to talk it over with her and let me know to-day."

"I know I did; but, I changed my mind, as a man has the right to do, when his reason is good. I consider that I had a pretty good reason."

The sport was slightly pale, and a heavy scowl was upon his brow.

"What was it changed your mind?" he inquired.

"See here, Barlow Gobert," the mayor turned upon him sternly, "are you a married man or are you not?"

"Ha! ha! ha! Then it was the nonsense of that woman last night that turned you against me, was it? I would take it as a huge joke if it did not work so confoundedly to my hurt."

"Do you know what was the first question I asked her?"

"A man would be a deaf, dumb and blind fool if he could not guess, now."

"Well, that was just what I did ask her; if it were true that you had a wife living; and you heard her answer."

"Yes; confound her!"

"You may confound her as much as you please; you can't get around the fact that she guessed what I had in mind, and that her reply was damaging to you. You are a stranger to me, anyhow, Gobert."

"We have known each other here for a couple of years, nearly, mayor."

"And that is all I do know about you. You will have to disprove what that woman has said against you, before you can entertain any hope regarding Tessie."

"You mean that?"

"I am in the habit of saying what I mean, and of meaning just what I say, as you ought to know by this time."

"Then I say— Confound that woman! Why, Mayor Dunn, her whole performance was a trick, and the more I have thought of it the more plainly I can see it."

"I wish I could see it in the same light."

"Any sane man, when he comes to think of it calmly, knows well enough there is no such thing as mind-reading. That is all sheerest nonsense. The woman had gained previously all the knowledge of matters she displayed here."

"Perhaps. How did she tell what articles were handed to her husband by men in the crowd, and she blindfolded?"

"That is an old trick. It is done by signals, somehow in the way the man put each question to her; letting her have the cue to the article."

"Possibly; but, when she had turned her back to the crowd, how did she tell what person he put his hand upon?"

"In the same manner. Or, perhaps it had been agreed between them the order in which the persons were to be named. It was trickery, somehow, and you may be sure of it."

"Then they had previous knowledge of persons and events here."

"Assuredly; and, for that reason, I am all the more suspicious that they had something to do with the murder of Deerland."

"Well, supposing they had, why should they come back here? Their object had been accomplished, and there was nothing to be gained by coming here, while there was everything to risk."

"You must admit that we have not yet learned why Deerland was killed. If we knew that, all the rest might be plain enough."

"Which it is far from being, as it stands now. But, the more I think of it, Gobert, the more I believe the woman was just what she claimed to be, a mind-reader; and that her performance was genuine."

"How, then, do you explain the finding of the dagger case in her room?"

"I don't explain it—don't pretend to explain it. As I told you before, I am not detective enough for the case, and I give it up."

"And believing the woman was all she claimed, you are prejudiced against me, and for the present my suit for your daughter's hand is hopeless? That is what I am given to understand, I believe."

"That is it, right to a point. The only thing for you to do, Gobert, is to prove to me that you are straight and right, and that done, I may be inclined to favor you. As it stands now, I must not only not encourage you, but forbid your paying any further attention to my child."

"And all this on account of that infernal charlatan."

"Call her that if you must, but the assertion is not the proof of it. Understand, sport, I am not taking the part of a foe toward you; I am merely telling you my determination respecting my daughter."

"And forbidding me, you lay the trap for my full defeat, if you know it."

"How? Bring me the proof I have demanded, and you will find that I am not so opposed to you. I have rather liked you."

"And in the mean time let some one else walk off with the prize, eh?"

"Ha! whom do you mean?"

"Well, I am not blind to the fact that this young upstart, Morton, has an eye in Tessie's direction."

"Is that so? I'm glad you told me, for it will give me the occasion to have an eye in his

direction. I tell you, Gobert, that girl is all I have in this world that is worth caring for, and I am going to care for her to the best of my ability."

"Can't blame you for it, either."

"Blame me for it! Man, if you love her as madly as you have declared to me, you ought to take pride in satisfying my every demand regarding your character. I am a rough man, I know, but there is a big soft spot in my heart for that girl of mine, and the man who takes her from me has got to be white, through and through, and his claim has got to be of the strongest."

"Here's my hand, mayor. I understand you now better than I ever did. I'll satisfy you, or I'll give up without a murmur."

The sport offered his hand, and it was warmly grasped.

"Sit down again, now," the mayor requested. "You have removed a doubt from my mind, and I want to talk with you."

"A doubt from your mind—"

"Yes; you have made me believe that you are sincere, and that that woman was, as you have said, a fraud."

"You have turned rather suddenly."

"Your frank manner has decided me. But, this don't do away with the pledge you have taken. I must have proof for what you are, just the same."

"You shall have it. But, what did you want to say further?"

"I want to ask you how we are going to go about solving this mystery and bringing that woman back to tell what she knows."

"You ask me too much. Since it has been impossible to find any one who saw her leave town, or to find any one who has seen her since, the outlook is dark so far as she is concerned."

"And then about the murder—the dagger—the finding of the sheath—"

"If I were a detective I might be able to do something, but since I am not I am at loss. And, speaking of detectives—"

Speaking of detectives, Gobert, leads me to make a disclosure to you. Old man Roefling has sent for one of the keenest detectives who ever brought a rogue to justice, and has been expecting him for some time."

"The deuce! I have heard nothing of this before."

"It has been kept very still. He did not let me into it till this morning."

"And who is the detective? that you are able to speak of him in such glowing terms. I know of but one such."

"And he is—"

"Deadwood Dick, Junior."

"He is the man. He is expected to arrive here at any hour, now."

"This is encouraging. Now it begins to look as though something would come of it. I hope he will be able to uphold his reputation."

"As I think he will, undoubtedly. He has solved even more intricate cases."

"Too bad he could not have been here last night. That pair of pretenders might not have baffled him as they did the rest of us."

"You are right. But, another word, Gobert: When he arrives we must do all in our power to aid him in his task. He will no doubt need every assistance we can give him. For the good name of Bowlder Bend, if nothing more, we must solve the mystery of the murder of Harry Deerland."

"I am with you, mayor, and here is my hand on it."

CHAPTER V.

THE DETECTIVE COMES.

It was about noon, on the following day, that a horseman rode into Bowlder Bend, drawing rein before the Queen Anne Hotel.

The personage was a man who was certainly no more than thirty-five years of age, and who, if it had been made a question for guessing, would have passed for nearer thirty.

He was of medium stature, with a bold, strong-featured face, dark hair and keen, magnetic black eyes.

"Where can I find Mr. Benjamin Roefling, gentlemen?" he made inquiry of those on the hotel piazza.

"Reckon he's down at ther mine-office, sir," was the answer one man gave.

"And where is the office?"

"Go right on down ther street an' turn to yer left. Can't help findin' et; buildin's painted white, and sign what says—'Cadet Mine-Office.'"

"Thank you, sir."

The stranger rode on, and turning as directed, disappeared from view from the hotel.

A moment later and Barlow Gobert hastily entered the office of Mayor Dunn.

"I'll bet he's come!" he hurried to announce.

"Who's come?"

"Deadwood Dick."

"Hal! that so? Where is he?"

"Gone on down to the mine-office. Now, maybe, something will be done."

"Let's hope so, anyhow. No doubt they'll come up to the hotel presently, and we'll fall in with them there."

The guess the sport had made was correct, for Deadwood Dick, Junior, the rider was.

Easily finding the office of the mine, he stopped at the door, leaped from the saddle and threw the bridle over a hitching-post and entered.

Only two persons were in the office, the manager and Cyrus Morton.

"Do I mistake, sir, in taking you to be Mr. Benjamin Roefling?"

So Dick asked, addressing the elder of the pair.

"You do not; that is my name," the mine-manager responded.

"Then I will briefly introduce myself. I am Richard M. Bristol, popularly called Deadwood Dick."

"Hal!" and the mine-manager leaped from his chair and came forward, throwing open the railing gate which divided the office in half.

"I am very happy to greet you, Mr. Bristol!" he cried, grasping Dick's hand. "I have been looking for you for some time, now, and am greatly pleased that you are here at last."

"My plans have been such that I could not present myself sooner, sir," the Prince of the West explained. "But, now that I am here, I am ready to take hold of the case at once, and see what I can do."

They had now taken seats.

"I gave you a full history of the affair in my letter, you remember?" the mine-manager reminded.

"Yes, I know you did, but it will do no harm to go over the main features of it again, to refreshen it in my mind."

"Shall we talk of it here, in the presence of Mr. Morton, my clerk and cashier? Or, had we better talk of it in private? You say as to that."

Dick turned his head and looked at the man under question.

"I suppose you trust Mr. Morton fully," he observed.

"Yes, sir, fully," the manager answered. "He knows all about the matter, as much as any of us."

"I can see no reason, then, why it should not be talked of in his presence. Were you employed here when the murder happened, Mr. Morton?"

"No, sir; I came later."

"Then you did not know Mr. Deerland?"

"On the contrary, sir, he and I were the best of friends."

"I'll tell you how it was," spoke up the manager, and Dick turned back again to him. "Harry and Cy, here, were chums at school, and when I brought Harry out he wanted me to make a place for Cyrus, too. I partly promised to do so, as soon as I saw the chance, but had not yet filled my promise when the terrible murder took place. That made a vacancy; and, knowing how well Harry had loved his friend, I sent for him to fill the position."

"And he came?"

"As you see for yourself."

"But, without knowing what was wanted until I got here," the young man spoke up. "I did not know Harry was dead until I arrived, and it was a hard blow for me. I am poor, and when the place was offered to me I could not refuse it. Besides, I had a hope that I might be able to do something toward solving the mystery and bringing Harry's assassin to justice."

Dick observed him closely for a moment after he had ceased speaking, and then turned again to the manager.

"Where is Mr. Morton from?" he asked.

"From California."

"And he was there when the murder was done?"

"Why, certainly, Mr. Bristol."

"Which is proof enough that he did no do the deed."

"Good-heavens! I hope you did not think for a moment he could be guilty of so fiendish a crime, did you?"

"Of course not. I merely mentioned him as one upon whom suspicion could not fall; nothing more. You need not feel at all alarmed, Mr. Morton."

Dick glanced at the young man again.

His face was pale, and his hand nervous, but

these effects were only natural—natural, all the circumstances considered.

"I—I am not alarmed," he said, "but your remark has pained me not a little, sir."

"I'm sorry for that. Just consider it as not made at all, if you can. And now, Mr. Roefling, for the particulars of the matter in hand."

"They are few and soon given. Harry Deerland, my nephew, was in my employ here as clerk and cashier, the same as Morton is now. He slept just here in this room which he had fitted up for a bedroom. One morning he was found dead in bed, with a knife-wound in his breast. The assassin had gained entrance by that window."

"And that is all you know about it?"

"That is all."

"He had no enemy?"

"None, so far as I know."

"Yet, he must have had one, it seems."

"I suppose so, for no man kills another like that without a reason for it."

"And you have found no reason why any person could want to put your nephew out of the way, eh?"

"No."

"There was no one to profit greatly by his death?"

"No one at all. There was no property at stake, or anything of that sort. I am puzzled, sir, puzzled."

"It does begin to look like a puzzle, true enough. By the way, Mr. Morton does not occupy this room, does he?"

"Of course not. He would not sleep there, in the room where his friend was slain, and I would not permit him to do so if he would."

"No, to be sure not. It was unnecessary to ask that. And then you are, you say, without a clue of any kind whatever?"

"At first we were, but how it is now I will leave for you to say."

"Then something has been brought to light?"

"The dagger with which the deed was done is in our possession."

"Ha! that is something—something of importance certainly."

"It was found here under the steps by the rear door."

"Who found it?"

"To tell that requires the explaining of attending circumstances, sir. If you will lend attention I will give you a full understanding of the matter."

"That is just what I am asking."

The story was told at length, about the performance at the Old Rye, the disclosure the woman had made, the disappearance of the couple, and the finding, later on, of the dagger sheath in their room.

Deadwood Dick listened faithfully to every word.

"Who found that sheath?" he asked.

"Barlow Gobert, the sport I mentioned before."

"And where is the dagger now? I would like to see it."

"It is in the possession of the mayor, and is at his office."

"I'll drop around there and see it before long. It may tell me something."

"We'll go to his office together, if you wish. That is, as soon as you are done here."

"I want to attend to the matter of dinner first, sir. That is an important item in my living, one not to be neglected."

"And it is near dinner time, too. Well, we'll go to the hotel, and no doubt we'll fall in with the mayor there. I have told him I expected you."

"You told me you intended to keep it very quiet."

"And so I have done till to-day. Gilmore was eager to be doing something, and so I told him."

"Your mayor's name is Gilmore?"

"Gilmore Dunn."

"Well, just show me into this room where the crime was committed, and we will then go."

The mine-manager opened the door leading to the bedroom, and a cozy little apartment was revealed to view.

It was about ten-by-twelve in size, and was furnished with a bed and a couple of chairs. By the head of the bed stood a trunk.

"Whose trunk?" Dick asked.

"Poor Harry's."

"How did you find it that morning?"

"It was locked, and the key was in the poor boy's pocket."

"You have examined it since, of course. Find anything to shed any light on the affair?"

"No; nothing whatever."

"Find anything missing?"

"No, so far as I knew what the lad had."

"It looks like a plain case. The object was murder, and that only. No robbery was thought of or attempted. Now, the question is, who could have any object in doing so dastardly a deed? That is what we must solve before we can strike the true trail. It may prove a baffling case, Mr. Roefling."

"I certainly hope it won't, Mr. Bristol. Do your best for me—your very best."

CHAPTER VI.

DEADWOOD DICK'S THEORY.

THEY soon left the mine office for the hotel, Dick leading his horse, and as they went along the mine-manager asked:

"Shall you register under your own name here, Mr. Bristol?"

"Oh, yes," Dick answered. "I'll let people know who I am and what my business is. It works just as well in some cases."

"I thought perhaps you would want to remain unknown, and so I was going to ask what name I should introduce you by. I have always understood that you great detectives deal in mysterious ways, ways that are past all finding out."

Dick smiled.

"We adopt different methods in different cases, according to circumstances, that is true," he said. "At any rate I do that. But, as to our being mysterious and past all finding out—Well, I will leave that for you to decide. You must admit that there is little that is mysterious about me, so far."

"Yes, that is so. I would never take you to be a detective."

"Ha! ha! You expected the sharp-nosed fellow with the penetrating eye, eh? A man in black, with an air of mystery and an unaccountable something-or-other."

The mine-manager laughed and responded, and so they talked till they came to the Queen Anne.

There Dick gave his horse to the keeping of a boy, and entered.

Dinner was just ready, and as soon as he had registered and made his terms with the landlord, he followed Mr. Roefling's lead into the dining-room.

Here they met the mayor and Barlow Gobert, and others, and Mr. Roefling made Dick known to them. He was no stranger there by reputation, and was the focus of all eyes throughout the dinner hour.

The murder mystery was talked of, in a manner, but it was not gone into in particular till the repast was over and they retired to the mayor's office.

There the four took seats to discuss the affair while they smoked their after-dinner cigars.

"I'll now look at that dagger, Mayor Dunn, if you please," Dick requested.

The mayor took it from his desk and handed it to him.

Dick examined it with apparently much interest, both the dagger and its holder, and asked:

"Is it reasonably certain that this is the weapon with which the deed was done? What proof is there on that point?"

"Why," answered Mayor Dunn, "the doctor who examined the wound says it was made with just such a weapon as this. The hole was round, but it was forced—not cut—in an oblong way."

"That reasoning is sound," the detective assented. "Being driven with force, this crooked weapon would make just such a wound as that, I would imagine. So, we will take that point as settled, and that this is the weapon that did the deed. Now, by whose hand was it done?"

He looked at those around him.

"That is just what we want you to find out for us," the mine-manager reminded.

"So I am aware; but, in order to do it, I shall require all the help you can give me."

"Which we stand ready to offer," declared Gobert. "As I said to the mayor here, I am ready and willing to do all in my power to clear the mystery away."

"Well, then, to begin with, can any one point suspicion in any direction?"

No one could.

"No one benefited by the young man's removal, so far as known?"

No one.

"It is a deep mystery, and I admit it as such. I want to say right at the beginning that it may baffle me. Mr. Gobert, you are the man who found this sheath, I am told."

"Yes, sir."

"Was it lying out in plain sight?"

"It was in plain sight when I chanced to look behind the chair."

"What were you looking for when you found it there?"

"For anything that might be found. Several of us had gone to the room for the purpose of a look around."

"I see. And there is, naturally, some suspicion that the Frenchwoman may have had something to do with the murder. That is to say, either she or the man, or both of them."

"So we think, now," the sport answered.

"But, it is strange why they should have come back here, don't you think so?"

"That is just the point I raised," said the mayor. "I cannot understand it at all. I believe you said Mr. Roefling has told you all about their performance that night."

"Yes, he has told me all about it."

"Do you think it a humbug or not?"

"Trickery, of course."

Gobert looked at the mayor in triumph. This was support for his argument, at any rate.

"You see," the detective added, "there are some things in this world which we positively know. One of these things is, that no mortal can look into the future for even the distance of one minute. Then, too, we know that no man can read the exact thoughts of another. These two things are simply impossible."

"And that being the case—" the mine-manager suggested.

"That being the case, all this couple revealed to the audience that night was knowledge previously gained, somehow, together with some clever system of hidden signals, such as are used by such performers."

"I am glad to hear you say so," cried the sport. "You have backed up my own argument, and I may be pardoned for saying that I feel somewhat proud of my stand in the question."

"But, this couple mysteriously disappeared, you tell me."

"Very mysteriously," said the mine-manager. "The last that was seen of them was when they entered the hotel."

"They must have gone out of the camp very quietly, and on foot, then, I would say. Now, we must look upon their conduct in one of two ways."

"And that is to say—"

"Either they were honest people, who were really threatened, or they had had a hand in the crime themselves."

"That is reasonable to suppose."

"If honest, then it follows that the murderer was here at that time, and that he threatened them as they said."

"But," objected the mayor, "you have said it is impossible for one person to read the mind of another. The woman pretended to read the mind of the murderer, and so they knew they were threatened."

"All the more proof, then, that the couple were in some way guilty, I think. That is the view I am forced to take of it."

"It is the rational view," said Gobert. "And, if anything else were wanting, here is this dagger-case that was found in their room."

"It is enough," Dick agreed. "In some way or other that man and woman were connected with the crime, and we must begin by running them to earth. They must be made to tell what they know. I guess they were more afraid of the law than of the imaginary murderer who, they said, threatened them."

"That looks as plain as day, now; can't you see it does, Mayor Dunn?"

The speaker was the mine-manager.

"It begins to dawn upon me that way, now," the mayor admitted; "but still there is a point I can't get rid of."

"And what is that?" asked the detective.

"Why, how they could read the question I was asking in my mind. That is the part that I can't make agree with the rest of it."

"I think I can help you out with that," said Dick.

"Then I wish you would."

"Let us look at the case, then, as it has been explained to me. I believe in some way the name of your daughter had been brought about—that is, mention of her. Then followed something concerning Mr. Gobert here. For a joke, perhaps, the woman hinted that Gobert had a wife."

"We have all agreed that they must have gained all their knowledge previously, somehow. They knew Gobert was attentive to your daughter—Mr. Roefling here has told me all this, you understand. Knowing that, the purpose of their joke was, no doubt, to put Mr. Gobert in a dilemma, by making you suspicious of his good intentions. This was to prepare your mind for their next trick."

"Well, right on top of that it was proposed that you should ask two questions secretly in your mind, and they would be answered. Had they not good reasons for knowing what your questions would be? It looks so to me, at any rate. Fresh in your mind was the suspicion they had thrown upon Mr. Gobert, and your first question would naturally be, Was there any truth in it? Then, having knowledge of the crime as they had, they knew that would be your second inquiry. You see, the chances were about a hundred to nothing that you would ask these very questions."

"Well, I'm blamed!" the astonished mayor cried.

"What did I tell you?" demanded the sport. "Wasn't I right?"

"You never told me anything like this, that is a sure thing," the mayor returned. "I'm glad to know I am not the only one who could not see through their game."

"It is simply wonderful," remarked the astonished mine-manager. "What a pair of frauds they were, to be sure. Why, Bristol, how did you ever figure it out so well as that? But, then, we have heard of Deadwood Dick before this day."

"Simply by adding thought to experience," was Dick's modest reply. "I have had some dealings with almost every shade of rascality, during my career. Now, it appears that we have a plain case, though it may be one that we shall never reach the end of. That man and woman must be found."

"But, how are you going to do it?" asked Gobert.

"That is the great question now. I must make the effort; I can do no more than that."

"Then you are going away from here?" asked the manager.

"After a day or two, if nothing turns up to give me another clue. The fact that the dagger sheath was left in the room by that couple points to them as the best clue to be followed."

"But, you may never find them."

"Just what I have said from the start; the case may be one that will baffle me entirely."

Their conference was a long one, but it came to an end at last, though nothing further of importance was brought out.

Deadwood Dick took up his task from that hour, and looked high and low there at the camp for a further clue, but without success; and so, after a couple of days of vain endeavor, took his leave, promising to report at some future day.

CHAPTER VII.

TENDER PASSION—GREEN MONSTER.

LATE on the afternoon of the same day on which Deadwood Dick took his departure from the camp, several men were gathered in the mayor's office.

They were the mayor himself, Benjamin Roefling, Barlow Gobert, Cyrus Morton, and several others; and they were talking about the detective, which they could do freely, now that he was gone.

"Yes, I'm disappointed in him, that's the truth," Roefling declared.

"He didn't come up to the expectations, eh?" queried the sport. "Well, that is the way I feel myself."

"But, then, he can't do the impossible in a day or two," defended the mayor. "The clue has been lost, owing to my blindness, and he has got to hunt that up before he can make any progress."

"It isn't altogether that," the mine-manager explained. "He is not just the sort of man I had imagined him to be. There was not that snap about him I had looked for in Deadwood Dick. Why, he seemed to idle away his time here doing nothing at all, far as I could see."

"My own opinion exactly," agreed the sport. "There seemed to be no vim about him. For my part, I fail to see how he ever earned the reputation he bears."

"Give him half a chance before you condemn him," the mayor still defended. "He may bring the mystery out all right yet."

"It is to be hoped he will," said Gobert, "but it looks doubtful now. I am afraid the secret will never be known."

"I have never got over the hint he threw at me," complained Morton.

"What was that?" asked the mayor.

"Why, he half hinted a suspicion that I had done the deed."

"Get out! You can't mean that. Why, you were not here at the time, and that is all you need to clear you."

"It wasn't so bad as the boy thinks," spoke up Roefling. "He has taken it too much to

heart. The detective merely asked where he was when the murder was done, and when we told him in California he remarked that he was beyond suspicion then, or something to that effect."

Barlow Gobert looked at Morton keenly.

"All the same it cut me," Morton declared. "Never had I a friend like Harry Deerland, and to think it should be hinted, even in jest, that I had killed him!"

"Well, you need not let it trouble you," assured Gobert. "If you were in California at the time, what need you care what they say about it? That is all you need, even were suspicion to arise against you."

A troubled look came for a moment into the young man's face, as Gobert watched him closely.

"He must dismiss it from his mind, that is all," enjoined Roefling. "The boy is too sensitive about it. Cast it out of your mind for good and all, Cy."

"That is what I try to do, sir, but it rankles in my breast all the same. All I have to say is—God help the man who killed Harry Deerland, if ever I get a clue to his identity."

It was said with such force that all looked at the young man, to find him with his hands clinched and a look of grim determination on his face.

"So say we all," approved Gobert. "It will be a sorry day for him, if the people of Bowlder Bend can lay hands upon him; eh, mayor?"

"You can bet your life it will," the mayor grimly asserted.

"But, to return to Deadwood Dick, I am of the opinion that he is going to lose his case this time. Why, if that French couple are really the guilty ones, they will take care they are never caught."

"Just what I'm afraid of," said Roefling. "And, they are smart enough to keep out of the way, too, from what we have seen of them."

"But, what brought them here? That is what puzzles me."

It was the mayor asked that.

"That may never be known. It certainly never will be if they cannot be discovered. I'll tell you what I'm going to do," and the mine-manager brought his fist down upon the table with some force; "I'm going to offer a big reward for the murderer. The only reason I did not do so at first was that I had every confidence in Deadwood Dick."

"Not a bad idea," the sport agreed.

"If the detective hadn't wasted so much time in getting here, it might have been better; and, if he had only been here on the night the French couple came I am sure he would have brought to light all they could disclose. But, that is past and gone, and no use mourning it. Yes, that's what I'll do, I'll offer a reward of five thousand dollars for the arrest of the murderer of Harry Deerland. That ought to bring some good result, I should think."

"It is to be hoped it will, anyhow," cried the mayor.

So ran their conversation in much the same strain till presently the coming of the evening stage was announced.

That was the signal for the breaking up of their conclave, and they went out to take note of the new arrivals, if there chanced to be any.

The stage drew up at the Queen Anne, and the driver greeted the crowd in a cheery way.

Among the passengers who alighted were two women.

Both were clad in black, and both were veiled, one having the appearance of being a woman of middle age.

They were unattended, and entered the hotel by the hall entrance, going into the ladies' sitting-room, or "parlor" as it was called. The male passengers entered the bar-room.

With them we have nothing to do.

After a time the proprietor of the place entered the room to wait upon his prospective guests.

Bowlder Bend, as was said at the beginning, was a flourishing camp, and it had outgrown its "woolly wildness" long ago. This hotel was an enterprising concern, and right up to date.

"Can I do anything for you, ladies?" the proprietor politely asked, as he entered the room.

"You are the proprietor, sir?" the elderly woman questioned.

As she spoke she threw back her veil, disclosing a face well preserved from the imprints of years.

Her hair was of the iron gray sort, as shown by the ringlets that appeared on each side in front of her ears, and she wore a pair of extra large gold bowed spectacles.

"Yes, lady," the proprietor answered.

"We would like to have a room for some

days, myself and daughter, if you can accommodate us."

"Certainly. I have just such a room as you would want, I think. Shall I register your names for you?"

"Yes, please. Mrs. Ranchards and daughter, of Yuma."

"All right. I will send my clerk immediately to show you to the room."

A question or two concerning the terms, on the part of the lady, and the landlord withdrew.

As soon as he was gone the younger woman threw up her veil.

"How I hate this thing!" she cried. "I'll be glad when we get to the room and I can lay it off for good."

She was a good-looking woman, perhaps twenty-five years of age, but one whose face showed the lines of care already. Of the two, her mother had the fresher look.

"Never mind, my child," the mother spoke. "You are not used to it, that is all. I will arrange so that you will not have to wear it any longer, if I can, and I guess I shall be able to do that."

"I hope so, mamma." They were interrupted by the coming in of the clerk to show them to their room, and the younger woman dropped the veil again.

The clerk conducted them to the room that had been assigned to them, with which the mother expressed herself well pleased, and there for the present let us leave them.

While the clerk was gone from the bar-room the landlord entered upon the register the name the woman had given.

"Who are the women?" inquired the mayor.

"Lady and daughter from Yuma," answered the obliging host.

"Yuma?" queried Benjamin Roefling. "Perhaps I may know them. What are their names?"

"They are a Mrs. Ranchards and daughter."

"No," thoughtfully, "I never heard of them. Must be strangers at Yuma since I knew the place."

"Very likely."

"I'll see them at supper, no doubt, and I'll scrape their acquaintance if I can. I used to live there at Yuma myself, you are aware."

Nothing more was said, and it was forgotten immediately by all save the mine-manager himself.

At supper the ladies were present, the hotel being run on the good old American plan; and the mine manager found himself sitting next to Mrs. Ranchards.

"I understand you are from Yuma," he presently said, after some casual words had been exchanged.

"Yes, sir," she answered.

"Your name is not familiar to me, though I used to live there."

"Perhaps I came there after you had gone away, sir! That would account for it, you know."

"It must be so. I removed from there about three years ago."

"And I have lived there but one year, and that not steadily. I have found Yuma quite a desirable place."

"Yes, so it is, if one does not mind warm weather. But, then, we must get used to that in this section. There are worse places than Yuma, a great deal."

From that the conversation grew, and Roefling soon found that the woman was well posted regarding the place she claimed to hail from. He also learned that she was a widow, which added to his interest in her.

The daughter had little to say during the meal, though Barlow Gobert, who sat opposite to her, tried to draw her out.

As these were not the only ladies present, the conversation did not flag without her.

The mayor and his daughter were among the regular boarders at the hotel.

Tessie was a charming girl of twenty.

It was to her that Gobert gave most attention, though he was not very warmly received, the girl seeming more inclined to respond to the advances made by Cyrus Morton, who chanced to sit next to her.

There was a dark look upon Gobert's face, as he glanced now and then at the younger man, whom he had good reason to regard as his rival; and, though he tried not to let his chagrin be seen, he felt it none the less keenly. He grew moody as the meal advanced.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNEXPECTED TURN.

IT was some time in the early evening that Barlow Gobert accosted Mayor Dunn in the Old Rye.

"Would like to have a little chat with you, mayor," he said, "if you don't mind. Guess it won't interrupt this dull performance."

"Not a bit, and it won't be any loss to me if I miss it, for it is as poor a show as Kris has had on in a long time. It is just about good for nothing, and that's all."

"Right. I want to talk about Tessie."

"'Um. Well, what is it, sport?"

"Have you yet changed your mind regarding me?"

"You have not yet satisfied me fully as to your past, have you?"

"Well, no, that's so; but, then, I thought that was off, after the way that woman was shown up as a fraud."

"It could be called off, I suppose; but, you promised to show up your record, and of course I looked for it. Why haven't you done it?"

"Well, there's good reason. The best I could do would be to get together a lot of letters from people you never heard of in your life, and you could just as well as not claim they were frauds."

"There is something in that, true."

"The only real proof would be to have you go with me to places where I have lived, and let you inquire around for yourself. Anyhow, it has occurred to me that it should be your business and not mine to look up the matter."

"That hadn't occurred to me at all, sport. But, I am afraid, on the whole, that it will be of no use."

"Why not?"

"I have sounded the girl on the question."

"Hal you did get around to that at last, eh? Well, what does she say?"

"She scorned the idea of ever wedding you. Says she does not care for you, and that it is out of the question altogether."

The sport's face darkened.

"So, that's the lay of the land, is it?" he cried. "Well, but you are her father, and I guess you can have something to say about that. You bet I would, if she were my daughter and I wanted her to do a certain thing."

"Don't forget what I have told you before, Gobert. That girl is the apple of my eye, and her happiness is my deepest concern."

"Perhaps there is some one else in the field against me."

"You can judge of that as well as I."

"Is it that young upstart, Morton?"

"He is attentive to her, as you must have noticed, and really I fancy the girl has a liking for him."

"And you encourage him?"

"He has said nothing to me, yet."

"Why don't you kick him out of her presence?"

"Well, that would be rather hard usage, don't you think so?"

"Not for him, the cur! Why, he came here without a cent, and was glad to take the place old Roefling offered him out of charity. He has nothing in the world."

"There is business in him, just the same, and he is not afraid of work."

"Do you mean to say that I am afraid of work?"

"Of course not; you needn't catch me up that way. I know you have no need to work, and none of us would work if we did not have to do it."

"And do I understand you that you will not try to influence the girl in my favor?"

"That is just about it, Gobert. She gave me her decision in the matter in a point blank way, and asked me never to refer to it again. You can judge from that what your chances are."

"And you are going to let her dictate to you like that?"

"Yes, if that is what you call it, I am."

The sport evidently could not control himself for further discussion, so he rose abruptly and strode out of the saloon.

"She won't listen to me, eh?" he grated. "I'll see about that. Curse the luck! the girl has taken a liking to that boy, and I have got to break that up in order to stand any chance myself."

He was going in the direction of the hotel, and had scarcely more than uttered his muttered words than he came face to face with Morton.

"Hello!" Morton greeted him. "What's happened?"

He could tell by the sport's clouded face that something was wrong.

"See here," and Gobert turned upon him with suddenness, "I want to ask you a question."

"Well?"

"Where were you on the night Harry Deerland was killed?"

The question was sharp and sudden, and Morton reeled back as though he had been struck a blow.

"Wh—why do you ask that?" he gasped, his face assuming a sudden pallor.

"Because I mean to know," was the answer. "I have some reason to believe you were not where you claim."

Under the glare of the bright electric lights the sport could see that he had struck hard somewhere and he meant to follow it up.

He was just in the mood to do it.

"If you know anything, or think you know anything, out with it," the younger man said with a little more show of spirit.

"You know well enough what I mean," the sport insinuated. "I want to know where you were on the night Harry Deerland was killed, and you will have to explain that point pretty straight."

Morton was now deathly pale, and a perspiration appeared on his face.

"By heavens!" Gobert cried, "you give me every reason to think you are the man who killed him. No wonder that detective's suspicion shocked you, as you claimed it did. Hang me if I don't think your case ought to be looked into. If you can clear yourself you had better do it."

"You—you—don't mean to accuse me of that crime, do you?"

"I mean to have you tell where you were that night. I have received a hint that you have not been playing a straight game here."

The young man was leaning with his shoulder against a post, now, and with hat off, he mopped his brow with his handkerchief. He was deathly pale, and guilt seemed to be written upon every feature.

"How—how did you know anything about it?" he gasped.

"That I need not say; it is enough that I do know something about it. You are in a tight box, whether you know it or not."

"For heaven's sake spare me, Gobert, and I'll tell you the whole story. It is something I could not tell Mr. Roefling. Spare me, and I'll tell you the whole matter."

"I'll make no promises. I was sure you had been playing a game. Your actions have spoken louder than words, from the first."

"But, I did not kill Harry—Heavens! you cannot think that of me, can you?"

"Why not? You had more to gain by his death than any one else that I know of, for it seems his uncle thinks of leaving to you what he would have left to Harry. This is a black thing against you, Cyrus Morton."

"But, I am innocent, as God is my witness I am innocent."

"Can you prove it?"

"Yes, yes."

"Let's see if you can. You were not in California when it happened, that is certain."

"No, no; I admit that, since you have learned, somehow."

Frightened and excited, the younger man was all but powerless to defend himself.

"And I happen to know just where you were," the sport declared, firmly. "I tell you again, Cyrus Morton, it is dark against you. How are you going to get out of it?"

"Spare me, Gobert, spare me!"

"Spare you, and let the crime of murder go unavenged? Not much!"

"But, I swear to you that I am innocent of that crime, Gobert. Will you not believe me?"

"If you are innocent it ought not to be hard for you to prove it, that is certain. You will have the chance to do so, too."

"Then you are going to tell what you know?"

"Certainly."

"My God! how did you find out anything about it? Do you know the truth of the terrible matter?"

"I know enough, Cy Morton. I have not been playing the detective for nothing, and the time of reckoning is now at hand for you. If you are innocent, prepare to get out your proofs."

Gobert had drawn a revolver, while speaking, and he covered Morton with the weapon.

Their last few words had drawn the attention of the passers-by, and some had stopped, and now at sight of this action on the part of the sport, a crowd quickly gathered.

Cried one man:

"Hello! hello! What's ther meanin' of this hyer? What has ther younker been doin', sport?"

"I arrest him on the charge of knowing something about the murder of Harry Deerland," was the grim charge made.

"Et can't be," cried another in the crowd.

"He was a thousan' miles from hyer when et was done. You ar' on ther wrong scent this time, boss."

"That is for him to prove," the sport declared. "Some one step to the Old Rye and bring the mayor. Also go for Mr. Roefling. He's right in the hotel there, no doubt."

Gobert had laid hand upon his prisoner, and with the weapon pressed against his head, there was no chance for his escape.

Morton was as white as death, and was trembling in every limb. If innocent, his manner was not speaking well for it; but, if innocent, the terrible charge might be enough of itself to cause his emotions.

"What ar' ye goin' ter do with him?" one man asked.

"I'll take him over there to the mayor's office," the sport answered. "Come on, boys, and see that he has a fair hearing."

So, with their prisoner, the sport and the crowd crossed to the building in which the mayor had his office, and in a few moments they were joined by the mayor and the mine-manager.

To say that excitement prevailed only mildly expresses the stir the news of the arrest made. By the time the mayor had turned on the light in his office the street in front was black with people, and the demand was loud for an outdoor hearing.

CHAPTER IX.

ALL REASON LOST.

"WHAT is this?" the mine-manager was eagerly demanding. "What is the charge against this young man? Why has he been arrested? Cyrus, what have you been doing, to get into trouble?"

The man who had gone for the mayor and the manager had been able to give only the vague fact that Morton had been arrested for something.

"I am responsible for his arrest, sir," spoke up Barlow Gobert. "A hint was given to me, I will not say how, that he had something to do with the death of Harry Deerland, and he has half admitted it."

"Something to do with Harry's murder!" repeated Mr. Roefling. "That is impossible. He was in California at the time, Mr. Gobert."

"On the contrary, sir, he was not in California."

"Not in California!"

"Exactly."

The prisoner stood as though rendered dumb, looking wildly from one to another of the group, while outside the clamor of the crowd was growing louder each moment.

"We'll have to satisfy the crowd out there," said the mayor. "They are bound to know what is going on here, and since a hint has been given that something has been learned about the murder they are wild."

"Don't take me out there," the prisoner pleaded. "If they suspect me they will hang me without any show."

"No they won't!" the mayor assured. "Boulder Bend is not run by Judge Lynch these days. Besides, we know you didn't do it, so there is nothing to fear."

"Don't be too sure of his innocence," insinuated the sport. "Just find out where he was the night Harry was killed."

The face of the prisoner was deathly pale, and beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead.

"Good heavens, boy, what does this mean?" cried the mine-manager. "Shake off this spell and tell us the truth. We know you are innocent, but your appearance would condemn you before any jury, almost."

"Y—y—yes, I am innocent, I—I swear I am innocent," the young man gasped. "But, I—I am almost overcome by the—the charge."

"What do you know against him, Gobert?" the manager demanded.

"I intend to make no charge, sir," was the cool response. "I am sorry that I have been forced to take any part against him. All I will say is, find out where he was on the night of the murder and make him explain what he knows about it."

"But, you will have to make a charge of some sort," said the mayor. "You are the man who made the arrest, and there is nothing else for you to do."

"Well, I have made my charge, mayor. I charge him with knowing something about the murder. I cannot say he is the murderer—"

"And you had better not say such a thing," cried the mine-manager, sternly.

"No, I do not say that, sir; but you will find that he knows something about it, and it may

not be easy for him to prove himself entirely innocent of the—"

"By heavens, sir, you are going about far enough! Cyrus, speak up, and clear yourself of all this unpleasant matter. What is it that has brought you to this? How has suspicion fallen upon you?"

"I am innocent, sir; oh, believe me, I am innocent; but—"

"But what?"

"I was here that—that night."

"What! you were here that night?"

The mine-manager looked the surprise he felt, as did everybody else who heard the admission.

There was a look of keenest triumph on the face of the sport, and he stepped back a pace to become less prominent in the unpleasant business.

By this time the crowd outside was fairly howling to learn what was going on, and the mayor realized that he had to do something to satisfy them. In spite of its vaunted advancement, it seemed that the wild nature in the camp had been only asleep, after all.

Throwing open the door, the mayor cried:

"What's wanted? What's all this uproar about, citizens?"

"We want ter know what's goin' on," one man shouted in answer. "Ef somebody has been arrested fer the murder of Harry Deerland, we want ter hear what he has ter say about et."

"But, nobody has been arrested for the murder."

"Then what's goin' on thar?"

"Why, young Morton has been arrested on charge of knowing something about it, that is all. We are going to give him a hearing, and no doubt he will be able to clear himself promptly."

"Let his hearin' be right out hyer in the street, then, ma'r," sung out another in the crowd. "Hyer's plenty o' light, an' we'll fetch tables in a jiffy. We ar' the people, an' we want ter know what's goin' on. Thar ain't no buildin' in the camp big enough ter hold us all, so we want ther court held right hyer in the street."

And the crowd shouted its approval wildly.

"Don't take me out there, please don't take me out there," the prisoner pleaded. "They will hang me before I can prove myself innocent."

He was now a picture of terror.

"Not much they won't," the mayor declared. "I am mayor here, I guess, and we have law and order in this camp. They shall not harm you, but they are bound to hear what you have to say, and you'll have to appear before them. They won't take any excuse from me."

"No, no; don't take me out there; please don't take me out there!" the poor fellow pleaded.

The mine-manager stood and stared at him blankly. It seemed that guilt was stamped upon his every word and act.

"Answer me, Cy Morton," he thundered.

"Y—yes, sir; I was here that night," the prisoner falteringly confessed.

"And you have lied to me! If you were here, what do you know? Out with it; quick!"

"Don't condemn me until you hear me," the prisoner asked, by main effort getting a little control of himself. "I swear I am innocent of the crime and all knowledge of it."

"But, what were you doing here?"

"I will tell you that, sir. The reason I did not do so was for—for poor Harry's sake, sir."

"Hold on," spoke the mayor. "The crowd won't be put off, and we'll have to go out there. They have arranged tables with chairs on them, and they are bound to hear the matter."

"And they have the right to hear it," decided the mine-manager, his own face now pale. "Bring the prisoner out."

"No, no, no!" the prisoner cried. "Don't take me out there, don't! They will hang me, I know they will—"

"They do not hang innocent men here," assured the mayor. "I have told you Judge Lynch does not rule here. You will be in no danger."

"Make them promise they will not harm me, then. I am afraid of them, for I know they liked Harry, and what I am going to tell may turn them bitterly against me. I know the danger I am in."

"I tell you I rule them, and is not my word enough?"

"You could not rule them, if they got wild, and it will look like a Judge Lynch court if we go out there."

At last the prisoner had gained control of his tongue, but not of his nerves, and his face was as pale as ever. He was trembling in every limb.

"Well, I'll get them to promise, then," the mayor said, and he stepped again to the door and faced the howling throng.

At sight of him the crowd became quiet, to hear what he had to say to them.

"Men of Bowlder Bend," he addressed them, "the prisoner is afraid of you, and he wants you to promise that you won't try any Judge Lynch game with him when he tells what he knows. I have assured him, but he wants the promise from you direct."

Cried one man:

"That don't sound much like he was innocent. Innocent men ain't afraid, are they? Bring him out hyer an' let us hear what he has got ter say fer himself."

"Yas, bring him out!" cried the crowd all together; and the demand was such that there was danger in further delay.

The mayor and another man took the prisoner out, the others following, and way was made for them to approach the tables placed in the middle of the street.

The very character of the camp seemed to have become changed in the few minutes, from that of a quiet and orderly, though "hustling" town, to a "wild and woolly" camp of the most pronounced type.

As soon as the impromptu stand was reached the prisoner was mounted upon it, the mayor and a couple of men with him, and leaving the prisoner in the hands of these two, the mayor addressed the crowd.

"Citizens," he said, "it was to oblige you that I decided to have the hearing in this case in the open air, so that all might hear. Let me say at the outset that this young man is not charged with murder. The fact is this: It became known, somehow, that he was here on the night of the crime, instead of being in California, as he claimed, and he was arrested upon the suspicion that he might know something about the crime which he has held back. That is all. That he is innocent of it himself, as he claims, I, personally, feel no doubt."

"Let him prove that," some one shouted. "Ef he was hyer, what was he doin' hyer? An' what did he lie about et for?"

Under the blue glare of the electric lights the prisoner's pallor looked almost deathlike, and his trembling could be seen by all. It was plain the sentiment of the crowd was against him.

"That's what's ther matter," the angry throng roared in chorus.

"You will understand that this is not a trial," the mayor reminded. "It is only a hearing of the case, to determine whether the prisoner shall go free or shall be held for trial. That is all; you must bear it in mind. The day of Judge Lynch is long past, here, you know, so you must not do or say anything that you may have reason to regret later on. The charge against Mr. Morton was made by Mr. Gobert, in the way of a duty he felt called upon to perform. Certain knowledge having come to him, it appears, and he having mentioned it to the prisoner, and finding it confirmed, he felt it his duty to make the arrest. Now, silence all, and we will hear what the prisoner has to say for himself."

All around the tables was a sea of faces, and as Morton looked upon them the power of speech seemed to desert him utterly.

Some allowance could be made for him, for he was a young man, of nervous disposition, and had never in his life attempted to address an audience; but, in the eyes of the crowd, everything pointed to his guilt of the terrible crime.

After a moment or two of waiting, during which the prisoner looked at the crowd in the most helpless way, a great shout went up, and, unheard, he was condemned for the murder of his friend. And, from somewhere in the mob, came the suggestion for a lynching. It was a critical moment.

CHAPTER X.

THE TRUTH MADE A LIE.

"SPEAK, man, for God's sake!" urged the mayor. "If you can say anything to clear yourself, say it; I can't control this mob, once it gets started."

"Men! Men of Bowlder!" the prisoner shouted, "I am innocent! I swear to you that I am innocent! Hear me! I had nothing to do with the murder of Harry Deerland! I do not know who did the deed! I will tell you all about it! Only hear what I have to say, and—and—and—"

Seeing, rather than hearing, that the prisoner was speaking, the crowd became silent, and as

silence fell the prisoner seemed to become afraid of his own voice and faltered.

In the uproar he had begun by shouting, but as the uproar died away and his own voice rose above it clear and sharp, he hesitated.

"Yas, tell us all about et," cried one man, having caught the last of the remarks. "That 'ar is what we want to know. Ye say ye know who did ther deed; let's have his name, an' I reckon thar will be a lynchin' hyer."

"No, no!" Morton cried. "I did not say I know who did it; I say I do not know who did it. I am innocent of it, friends, and I know nothing about it any more than the rest of you. I beg you to believe me, for I am speaking the truth. As God is my judge, I know nothing about it."

"Is that 'ar as true as your statement that ye was in California at ther time et happened?" sung out one man.

"We want the facts of the business," urged Mr. Roefling. "If you were here that night, what were you doing here? And if here, why did you say you were in California? You certainly went there direct, for you were there when I sent for you a little later on."

"I will tell you, sir, I will tell you; and the only reason I have not done so before is because I wanted to hide poor Harry's shame."

"Hide Harry's shame! What do you mean by that? What shame do you mean to say that poor boy had? You had better have a care how you conduct this case, I can tell you."

Morton trembled, and if possible his face grew yet more pale.

"I am afraid you will not believe my story," he said, "but I most solemnly swear it is the truth, and nothing more or less."

"Out with et, then," urged the crowd.

"Yas, let's hear et!"

With hands tightly clinched, showing the effort it required for him to face the ordeal, the young man began his narration.

"I was here that night," he said, "because Harry had sent for me, and he had told me to come quietly and alone, and to remain in the background till he was able to see me. He appointed a place of meeting, and I was not to enter the camp till I had first seen him."

"That's a likely tale!"

"That ar' don't go down!"

"You will have ter deal again!"

"Hold on, hear what more he has to say," cried the mayor. "For the sake of the dignity of the camp, boys, keep law and order uppermost in mind."

"I came just as Harry asked me to come," the young man went on. "I hung around outside the camp till he joined me, and then he unfolded a plot in which he wanted me to join him, but I refused. He tried to win me over, but I was firm, and finally I talked him out of the thing, and he asked me to go away unseen and to keep it a secret. I am sure he repented, and that he gave the project up."

"What are you driving at?" demanded Mr. Roefling, severely.

"I will tell you, sir, I will tell you; though I know beforehand you will not believe me. But, I swear it is true, every word, as true as gospel."

"As true as that you war in California when ye wur right hyer, hey?" sneered one man.

"As true as God's own words," declared the prisoner. "Harry laid before me a scheme in which he wanted me to join him, and that scheme was, to rob Mr. Roefling's safe and share the money—"

"You infernal scamp!" thundered Mr. Roefling. "How dare you say such a thing of Harry Deerland, and he dead and unable to dispute you? How dare you!"

"It is the truth, sir; it is—"

"Et won't go down," one fellow shouted. "Et sticks in our gullicks. We find we can't swoller et."

"More'n likely et was t'other way."

"That's more like et."

"That you kem hyer an' wanted Harry ter do that, an' 'cause he wouldn't ye went an knifed him."

"You had better make a clean breast of it," Mr. Roefling said, in a tone of suppressed passion. "You will gain nothing by your lies, be sure of that."

"I am telling the truth, Mr. Roefling; God is my witness—"

"You had better not call upon that Name, for it shows for itself that you are lying to us. Harry Deerland was the soul of honor, and what you say against him can only work harm to yourself."

"We knowed Harry Deerland," yelled the mob. "Ye can't tell us nothin' about him to

his hurt. He was a white chief, Harry was, right down to ther heels. When ye tell us he p'posed ter rob ther mine safe, then we know fer sure ye ar' lyin' to us. Better tell a straight yarn, pardsey."

"I speak that which is true," the prisoner cried, desperately. "I thought I knew Harry, too, and that he was the soul of honor, as you say, and I was both surprised and pained when he made such a proposal to me."

"Ha! ha! ha! We hear ducks quack!"

"Will you not believe me?"

"Believe you!" thundered Mr. Roefling. "Believe that Harry Deerland ever proposed such a thing as that! You have placed a rope around your own neck, for, judging all your words and actions in this light, I believe you are his murderer!"

"Good-heavens!"

The prisoner gasped rather than spoke, and covered his face with his hands as a sob shook his frame.

"And a rope is what he wants, bad!" yelled some one in the crowd.

"Yas, an' what he'll git, too!" shouted another. "Harry Deerland must be avenged!"

"Hold on!" ordered the mayor, sternly. "Don't attempt anything of the sort here, boys. Remember I am mayor here, and that I am responsible. If the prisoner is deemed guilty, we'll hold him for trial—"

"And give him ther chance ter 'scape, hey?"

"He will get no chance—"

"Ye ar' right he won't. We mean ter lynch him, same as we have sworn ter do ef we ever got holt o' Harry's murderer."

"But, I am innocent, I swear I am innocent!" screamed the prisoner.

"Yer story don't prove et. Yer' a liar of ther first water, an' we have et from yer own lips."

"I have told only one lie, and that was in saying I was in California when the murder was done. And, in truth, I may as well have been, for all I know about it."

"Lynch him!"

"String him right up!"

"Hold!" ordered the mayor, yet again. "Citizens, don't disgrace your camp in this way—"

"Disgrace nothin'! Et will be more a disgrace ef we let ther cur live hyer another hour, after the lyin' way he has been deceivin' us all along."

"Can you prove his story false?"

"Didn't we know Harry? An' ain't he owned up ter one blank lie? What more d'ye ask?"

"All I ask is a fair trial, men of Bowlder Bend," the prisoner pleaded in his own behalf. "Give me the rights of a man, and be fair with me. Would you hang me without a trial?"

"You have been tried and found guilty," one man retorted.

"But, I have the right to a trial by jury, in this land. I swear I am innocent, and you have got to prove me guilty before you can hang me."

Despair was lending him boldness, now.

"Got to, have we, hev? Waal, now, mebby we have got somethin' to say about that 'ar. You have had the best kind of er trial, with ther hull crowd hyer as yer jury, an' we say ye ar' guilty. That settles et."

"Back!" and now the mayor of the camp stood with drawn revolver. "You have no right to take this prisoner from me," he cried.

"I warn you not to attempt it."

"Do ye mean to defend a murderer, Mayor Dunn?"

"I mean to protect this prisoner if I can do it, citizens."

"An' ye would kill honest men fer him?"

"Do not force me to do such a thing as that. God forbid that it should happen."

"How deceived I have been in you, Cyrus!" Mr. Roefling observed, musingly. "It does not seem possible that I am looking upon a murderer."

"I am no murderer, sir! I am innocent of the charge. But, I am helpless to prove it; I have only my bare word to offer. Won't you intercede for me, that I may at least have a fair trial?"

"The mayor will see to that, of course. But, much as I hate to admit it even to myself, the outlook is dark for you. No one but you could benefit by Harry's death. Perhaps he had told you that he had asked me to remember you, in case anything happened to him. This was when I spoke to him of making my will in his favor."

"No, no; I knew nothing about it, sir."

"Well, I hope not; but, the story you have told— What! Harry Deerland a would-be robber? That one statement damns you, sir!"

"Of course et does!" yelled the mob. "Let's

make short work of his case, my pards! Let's give him what we swore ter give ther murderer of we got holt o' him."

"Out of ther way, mayor! We don't want ter harm nobody, but we mean ter give a'zample fer all murderers ter take warnin' by. We have got all ther proof we want, an' we ar' goin' ter hang him."

"I call upon all good citizens to aid me!" appealed the mayor. "This terrible crime must not be done, men of Bowlder Bend! You are mad to propose it. If the first crime was murder, this will be none the less such. I order you, as mayor of your camp, to desist!"

Perhaps his words would have carried weight, but a few in the crowd urged the rest on, and at last with a mad roar they pressed forward, eagerly demanding the prisoner, that they might satisfy with his life their bloodthirsty desire. It was a mad time, nearly the whole population of the camp was pressed into the street around the tables, and the mayor was like a reed against an avalanche so far as being able to stand against such a mad mob.

CHAPTER XI.

TESSIE DUNN CHIPS IN.

It seemed as though the citizens of Bowlder Bend had suddenly gone insane, and that nothing but the taking of a human life would satisfy them.

But, perhaps there was some excuse for them, believing as they did that the murderer of Harry Deerland was within their grasp, and being eager to avenge that dastardly crime upon somebody.

Deerland had been well known and well liked, and this story told by Morton was set down as a lie out of the whole cloth. It, more than anything else, perhaps, had condemned him. Had he stuck to his first falsehood, that he had been in California at the time of the crime, it would have fared better with him.

The table on which the mayor stood was given a lurch, and the mayor was toppled over into the crowd, some men catching him as he came down, and then the prisoner was taken.

"Have mercy on me! Have mercy on me!" the poor fellow cried. "I did not do that deed! I swear to you I did not do the deed! Spare me, oh! spare me!"

"Yas, we'll spare ye; you bet we will!" cried the ringleader of the mob, one Hiram Horn, the acknowledged cock of the camp. "Et looks mighty like ye was innocent, that's ther fact."

"No lynching, boys!" cried the mayor. "No lynching! It is murder, here in a place where law and order are supreme. Don't do anything of the kind, or it will go hard with you. Be warned in time. Mr. Roefling! Sport Gobert! This madness must be checked!"

"Listen to reason, men," cried Mr. Roefling. "Let the law deal with the fellow. He must have a fair trial."

"Yes, yes; no lynching!" cried Gobert. "A fair trial, men; a fair trial!"

"You ain't in et, mayor," cried Horn. "Nor you, Manager Roeflin'; nor you, sport. We ar' the people, hyer, an' ther prisoner at ther bar has been tried an' found guilty, an' that settles et. Bring him on, boyees!"

"You bet!"

"Lynch him!"

"String him up!"

"Whar's ther tree?"

"Never mind no tree; hyer's ther light-poles!"

"Hooray! Fetch on ther rope! Now fer a reg'lär old necktie party! Whoop!"

The wild element held sway, and it had fairly broke loose, now. There was every prospect for a speedy hanging.

Of course, many voices were raised in protest, but they were sadly in the minority, and were of none effect. Women were screaming and pleading, and the crying of children added to the uproar.

A table had been quickly placed beneath one of the electric light poles, and the prisoner, with a rope already around his neck, was lifted upon it, where he sunk in a heap, begging and pleading for his life. It was a terrible spectacle, and the picture is in no wise overdrawn.

One man had already climbed the pole, or was climbing it, with the end of the rope in his teeth, and it looked as though the end was near.

Suddenly from the piazza of the hotel was heard a woman's scream more loud and more piercing than any before it, and the crowd looking that way saw Tessie Dunn, her arms uplifted in protest.

"Spare him!" she cried. "Spare him! He is innocent, I know he is innocent! If you love me, men of Bowlder Bend, spare him for my sake, for I love him— Yes, yes, I love him!"

Spare him! Oh, spare him! You are mad! mad! to think of doing such a deed here!"

The man with the rope had almost reached the arm of the pole, now, and in a moment more the rope would be thrown over.

"He is a p'izen cur, miss," cried Hiram Horn. "You have been fooled by him, ther same as ther rest of us was. He ain't worth one thought from you, an' we ar' goin' ter out him whar—"

"Hold!" the girl's voice interrupted, and she was seen with a revolver in her hand and it pointed straight at the man on the pole. "Hold! If you put that rope over that arm, sir, I will bring you to the ground with a bullet through your heart! You know whether I am a good shot or not."

The man on the pole looked, then stopped.

"Go on!" yelled the crowd! "Go on! Go on! She can't hit ye!"

"An' even ef she does, what's ther odds?" chipped in another man. "Ther performance has got ter move on, now."

"No, I thank ye," the man on the pole declined, as he began a hasty descent. "I ain't no hog, I ain't; I don't want no more'n my share. Somebody else is welcome ter try it on."

"The man who climbs that pole, dies!" cried the spirited girl. "For shame! men of Bowlder Bend! What are you thinking about?"

"And we are ready to aid this noble young lady in carrying out her purpose," cried another voice, and two other women appeared beside Miss Dunn on the piazza, each similarly armed.

They were Mrs. Ranchards and her daughter!

For the moment, at any event, the crowd was silenced and checked.

And then it was that a man was noticed pushing his way through to the table on which the prisoner was standing.

With a few more pushes and shoves he broke through, and a spring landed him upon the table in plain sight of everybody, where his first act was to remove the rope from the prisoner's neck.

"What on airth ar' ye tryin' ter do hyer, anyhow?" he was at the same time demanding in loud tone. "Great tall tail-feathers! was ye goin' ter do a lynchin' right hyer under ther 'lectric lights o' modern civilization? Wull, I guess we had better hold our bosses a minnit."

He was a rusty-looking customer, clad in a seedy suit of black, his long-tailed coat several sizes too big for him, making him appear small and insignificant in its too-ample folds.

"Who in blazes be you?" demanded Hiram Horn. "What d'ye mean by comin' hyer an' interruptin' justice in her acts o' vengeance?"

"Bless ye, pardner, I didn't break up ther fun; et was that ar' leetle gal on ther peazzy."

"But, you are takin' a hand in et now, all ther same."

"Wull, mebby that's true 'nuff. Ef et is, I'm hyer ter back up my actions, I guess! I'm p'izen 'gainst lynchin', an' don't ye forget et. I was in a fix o' that sort myself once, an' I know how et feels."

"Pity they didn't make a job of it, then; and I'll bet they had the right man, too."

"No; that's whar ye ar' wrong. I was out on a lecturin' tower in ther cause o' temperance, an' I struck a camp whar they thought my quickest cure was a rope, an' they set about applyin' ther cure wi' no loss o' time."

The fickle mind of the mob was already undergoing a change.

"An' how did ye git out of ther scrape?" one man in the crowd inquired.

"How did I git out? Wull, I'll tell ye that, seein' as I have started ther ball ter rollin'. Ye see, they didn't use a very good rope, an' by ther time they had yanked me up ten or a dozen feet the thing parted an' down I flopped, all in a heap. An', I was cured. All ther temperance had been choked clean out of me, you bet."

"Hol' on, pard's, I bellered; 'hol' on! I am convert'd, you bet! I made a mistake! I'm hyer to take orders for ther Best Brand Old Bull Brandy! Let's go an' likker up at my expense!"

"An' that was what saved my life. I tell ye it's a turrible thing ter have yer neck stretched, fer I have been thar an' know all about et; an' that's why I have chipped in hyer. Ye see, thar is jest ther shadder of a possibillyee that ye have got ther wrong man, anyhow, same as they had in my case, an' then ye would be sorry."

Some in the crowd laughed at the story of his experience in the hanging line, and the mad desire of the mob was turned aside.

The ringleader, however, hated to give up a matter that had been going ahead so well.

"Thar ain't no mistake," he cried. "Do you know what this prisoner has done, Mister Stranger Man?"

"No, I don't; but et's jest possible that he didn't do et a tall, or that he made a mistake, same as I did in my case. Mebby he didn't go ter do et, or didn't know et was loaded, or somethin' like that."

"I am innocent, I swear I am innocent!" the prisoner cried.

"Do ye hear that 'ar?" demanded the newcomer. "Ther man says he is innercent, an' mebby he is, same as I was. Has he had a fair trial?"

"He don't need none," roared Mr. Horn. "He has been found guilty by ther hull crowd hyer, an' we ar' goin' ter put out his light in ther most 'proved style o' manner."

"But, what's he done?"

"He has done a murder, that's what."

"That's bad, I low, but that ain't nothin' compared to boss-stealin'. Now, ef et had been a clear case o' that kind, then I wouldn't say a word; but bein' as it is, an' havin' had ther 'sperience I have had, I must get right up an' howl in protest. No lynchin', gentlemen."

Morton was saved, for the present.

The crowd had now come to its senses, save for the few disappointed ones, and the tide was turned.

Mayor Dunn was prompt to take advantage of it.

"I'm glad to see you have thought better of a wrong action, citizens," he cried out. "It would have been a terrible blot upon us, if you had carried out your mad purpose. We will lock the prisoner up, and he can have a trial. Bring him along to the jail, boys."

"That's what's ther matter," cried the stranger. "Give him a fair trial, and right hyer let me speak up fer the job of defendin' him. I am a lawyer, but somewhat rusty jest now, and I'm a hummer at cheatin' ther galluses, you bet. Havin' had a taste of 'em myself, I know what et is, an' I git right up an' hump myself when I git a case."

Even as he was speaking he had with one hand lifted the prisoner down from the table and given him into the charge of the mayor and his men.

"Yes, that's what I am, a lawyer," he continued, to hold the attention of the throng while the prisoner was being taken away, as a close observer would have guessed; "and I'm a reg'lar old be-hoss at ther business, too. If I git this hyer case you can bet ther State has got ter git up an' git ter outdo me. An' now what do ye say, boys, ter givin' three rousin' cheers an' a royal Bengal tiger fer ther leetle gal thar on ther peazzy what chipped in fer ther prisoner? Let's hear what ye kin do."

Taking off his own battered stovepipe, he waved it and led the cheering, and the crowd cheered with a will.

By the time they had done the prisoner was out of sight, and for the time being was safe from harm. But, Mr. Hiram Horn was not satisfied, it appeared; he wanted satisfaction for being cheated out of his "fun."

CHAPTER XII.

MR. HORN MEETS A SURPRISE.

"I WANT ter know what this hyer camp is comin' to," Hiram broke out. "Ain't et a party state o' things, when a stranger comes in hyer an' runs our business? I am askin' ef et jest ain't!"

"Ther mayor was right, though, Hi," asseverated one man. "We was a leetle too hot ter hang ther feller. Even a nigger has got ther right to a trial, even ef ye are dead sure he's guilty."

"That 'ar ber darn! What I'm talkin' at is that this hyer galoot has come hyer an' chipped in on our ante, an' he has run ther game ter suit himself. Ar' we goin' ter stand that sort o' thing?"

"What ar' ye goin' ter do about et, then?"

"I'm goin' ter show him. We have got ter have 'citemen't o' some kind ter take ther fire out'n our blood, now that et's b'ilin', an' I'm goin' ter polish this Mister Lawyer off fer his smartness. D'y'e hear what I chirp, ye big-coated galoot?"

"Bless me, ar' ye talkin' at me?" the stranger asked.

"I ain't talkin' ter nothin' else," was the retort. "D'y'e know what I'm goin' ter do ter you?"

"N-n-no, my good friend, I haven't the slightest idea. I—I hope you ain't goin' ter do anything of a desperate nature, are ye?"

"You come down off'n that 'ar table till I jest show ye, that's all. I'm the cock of this hyer

camp, an' I don't low no stranger to come in hyer an' trim down my spurs, an' don't ye forget et!"

"N—n—no, I won't ferget et, I'sure ye I won't; I'll do my best ter remember et, my good man—"

"Don't ye good man me; I'm a darn bad one, as you're goin' ter find out 'fore ye git done wi' me. I'll farn ye what et costs ter come hyer an' chip in on my deal. Git right down frum thar, now, an' take yer dose."

"Why, I have no grudge 'gin' you, sir; I—I—I don't want to fight, if that is what you mean. I ca—ca—can't fight, 'cept in the oratorial 'reena. Let us make up now, and I'll stand treat for the crowd. I take water, sir, in the biggest kind o' doses."

"That won't do a tall," roared the belligerent. "I'm out fer satterfaction, an' I'm goin' ter have et, you bet! Git down, now, or I'll dump ye down! Clear ther way, boyees, an' make a ring fer me ter whirl him 'round in, an' see ef I don't turn his vest outside his coat 'fore I git done wi' him. Come, git down hyer, I say! Et's you I'm callin'!"

With this new excitement, the excitement of the moment before was forgotten, and as the crowd cleared a space for the fight they cheered wildly and urged the lawyer to accept the challenge.

"B—b—but et's beneath my dignity as a member of ther bar, ter git into a fight," he tried to evade. "Besides, it's against the law to fight, an' of thar is any one thing more than another that I have respect fer, et's ther law. Can't we settle et out of court, so ter say, friend?"

"No, ye can't; an' as ter bein' yer friend, I'm ther wu'st enemy ye ever run up against in all yer born days. Come, now, ther crowd has paid its fare an' et wants ter see ther fun. Ef ye don't git down from thar in one blessed minnit, hang me fer a thief ef I don't take ye by one leg an' land ye down hyer on the broad of yer back!"

"Well, ef I must, I s'pose I must; but, sir, please don't use me up any worse than ye can't help, will ye?"

At that the crowd roared, and everybody was now keenly alive for the fun that was expected to follow.

Now, of course, the women and children had got out of the jam, and only the rougher portion of the camp's population made up the ring.

"I'll show you how I'll use ye!" responded Mr. Horn. "I'll use ye a good deal wuss, too, ef ye ain't hasty about gettin' down hyer. What's ther matter? Why ar' ye hangin' fire so?"

"I—I—I was hopin' that mebby ye would change yer mind, that's all. But, I guess I hope in vain, so I'll have to obey your orders and take my punishment, I suppose. There's one favor I want to ask, though, and I hope ye won't deny me that."

"Wull, what is et?"

"Please don't hit me on ther nose."

"Haw! haw! haw! Why, ye 'tarnal lunk, that's the very place I'm goin' ter tap the first crack."

"That is bad, very bad! I hoped that you would spare my beauty. Well, then, please don't black my eyes. Think of et, a lawyer with blacked eyes! Spare my eyes and do whatever else you want to."

"Spare nothin'! I'm goin' ter do ye up so's yer own dad won't know ye ef he sees ye. Come, now, no more foolin', but git right down hyer. Ther crowd is dyin' ter see me do ye up, an' I'm almost dyin' myself wi' fever of ther blood what's got ter be worked off somehow. Come!"

"Well, I come."

In a slow, reluctant way that made everybody laugh, the stranger got down from the table and faced his opponent in the middle of the ring.

"Git out o' that coat," ordered Mr. Horn.

"No, no," the lawyer protested. "I want all the protection I can have. You must whip me coat and all, sir."

As he spoke he was rolling the cuffs back out of his way a little, as if he at least meant to make one effort to defend himself.

"Wull, coat an' all et is, then," agreed Mr. Horn. "Jest say when you ar' ready, an' sail in."

"Oh, I'm as ready now as I kin git, I s'pose," the seedy lawyer sighed. "I am not eager for it, and am only hyer 'cause I have ter be. Sail in yourself, if you want to; you ar' doin' et."

"Ar' ye all ready?"

"I s'pose so."

"Wull, then, look out fur me, fer hyer I come!"

Hiram Horn was a fighter of no mean ability in the estimation of his fellow-citizens.

In his own estimation he was a fighter of the first rank, and it was certain that he had a right to the title he laid claim to—cock of the camp.

With his words, he adjusted himself nicely and went sparring forward toward the awkward-looking individual in the big coat, with the deliberate intention of tapping him nicely on the nose for a starter.

The seedy lawyer looked alarmed, and glanced at the ring around them as if to discover a hole through which he might escape. There being none, he had to face his foe, and by that time Mr. Horn was about ready to do damage to his person in the manner mentioned.

"Easy, now," he observed, "and I'll tap you gently right there—"

He reached out to do the tapping, but somehow or other the tapping didn't follow his avowed intent.

The lawyer had lazily put up one hand, and the blow was brushed aside as easily as can well be imagined. The man was surprised, and so was the crowd.

"What ye doin'?" the "cock" demanded, angrily. "I was only goin' ter hit ye a leetle one that 'ar time, but now I'll lam ye fer all I'm wu'th."

And, accordingly, he suited action to the words, and if his blow had landed where he intended it should, it would have been bad for the lawyer; but—it didn't! It was brushed aside as easily as before.

"What's ther matter, Hi?" one man called out.

"Why don't ye lambaste him oncefer luck?" shouted another.

"Ye don't mean ter say ye can't do et, do ye?" yet another taunted him.

"Mean ter say I can't do et! I'll show him, an' you too, 'bout that! He'll be sorry—"

He sent in another heavy blow, one that must have lifted its victim clear off the ground, if it had struck him.

Just as easy as before did the seedy lawyer brush it aside, and he looked at his opponent and at the crowd around them as though struck dumb with wonder.

"Please don't fool with me, Mr. Terrible," he requested, "but give me my medicine quick and let me go. This hyer suspense is killin'. I'd ruther take a lickin' than be expectin' one."

"That's what ye wull be doin' now, blast ye!"

At him the cock of the camp rushed, then, meaning just what he said, but it somehow happened that he did not do anything.

He pawed and clawed and slashed away, but the worst he could do was to bring his arms into painful contact with those of the big-coated stranger, who brushed his blows away with no effort at all, seemingly.

And so it was kept up till the "cock" backed away and stopped for want of breath.

"Waal, I'm amused," drawled the lawyer. "If that is fightin', wonder ef I couldn't do better myself? You can't fight a little bit, Mister Awful."

The crowd was hooting and yelling now, casting all manner of taunts and slurs at their admitted bad man, who did not seem to be so very dangerous after all. Truly, it looked as though he had met more than his match.

"Who ther doose ar' you, anyhow?" Mr. Horn panted.

"Who be I? Why, my name is Hobson Johnson, and I'm a lawyer, just as I told ye before. I am rusty, now, and have lost all my polish out hyer in this woolly land, but I'm no slouch when I'm at ther bar, you bet!"

"What kind o' bar?" some one asked.

"The legal bar, to be sure," with much dignity.

"No, an' ye don't seem ter be no slouch when ye ain't at ther bar, uther," snorted the baffled cock of the camp. "I don't believe I could hit ye if I tried my best, an' that's the fact."

"I don't really believe ye could, friend, an' that's ther fact, too, if what ye have been doin' is countin' fer anything. But, wasn't ye only playin' with me? If ye ar' goin' ter lick me, why don't ye do it an' not keep me in this misery of expectation so long?"

"He can't do et, Hobson."

"An' what's more, he knows he can't!"

"Why don't ye parrylize him, Hi? Give him rats!"

"Yer dog is dead in this hyer town, ef ye let him beat ye!"

That Mr. Horn knew, and that was what troubled him. He must make another desperate showing, if nothing more.

"Waal, et's you or me fer et, lawyer," he cried out. "Either you go down or I must, an' no foolin' about et this time, either. Make ready!"

"I'm all ready, an' ef ye mean et I think I'll try my hand on you this time. Et was your fight, ye know, so don't blame me ef somebody gits hurt. Come on, now, an' best man wins."

Together they sprung, and for some seconds there was little to be seen save arms and legs and the tails of the lawyer's big coat. Then out of the confusion rose the cock of the camp, several feet in the air, and down he came all in a heap, while the lawyer smiled and bowed to the crowd.

CHAPTER XIII.

A PECULIAR STAND TAKEN.

The cheer that went up then was enough to make the electric lights dance, if sound vibrations count for aught.

With one voice the whole crowd let itself loose, and the windows on both sides of the street fairly rattled, while the inclosing hills rung to the echo.

"Bully fer you, Hobson Jobson!" cried one man, as soon as a single voice was to be heard above the din. "Yo' ar' ther cock of ther camp, now, fer sure. You have yanked ther bun, by gracious!"

"That's what he has," chimed in another. "Horn wasn't in et a tall, this time. Whar did ye farn that 'ar trick, lawyer? Ef you ar' half as good at ther law as ye ar' at fightin', this hyer camp is jest ther place fer you to hang up your hat an' stay at."

"Thank you, citizens, thank you," the lawyer bowed this way and that. "You flitter me. I do not lay any claims to being a fighter, but when et comes to a tussle at ther bar—bar o' jestice, mind ye, then I'm right ter home, an' I kin hold up my end 'ginst anything that comes along. Pardon my uncouth manner of speech; force of habit and association, you know."

Hiram Horn had now untangled himself, and was getting up out of the dust.

"Whar am I at, anyhow?" he cried. "Was ther a yearthquake hyer? Is ther hull blamed town upside down?"

He looked around foolishly, as he shook the dust out of his feathers—figuratively speaking.

"Et was a yearthquake what struck you, anyhow," some one informed him. "You picked up a tornader that 'ar time, Horn."

The cock of the camp had now got his eye upon the lawyer.

"Et wasn't you done et, was et?" he asked.

"I was ther, pard," was the sober response. "I hope ye didn't git hurt."

"Nothin's hurt but my feelin's, an' they ar' all plowed up ther back an' disrupturated generally. I wouldn't a' believed ther was a man in ther hull blamed Territory could a' done that to me, if I hadn't been hyer to witness et fer meself. Will ye shake, stranger?"

He held out his hand.

"I never refuse ter do that," was the response, and the lawyer grasped his hand heartily. "Et was your own fault, as you must admit, fer I tried hard enough ter keep out of ther muss. I'm no fighter, an' I allus hate ter git into a scrap, fer then I have ter do my little best, ye know, an' I'm sech a mighty ongainly critter that ther other fellow don't know how ter git at me."

"Nothin' of ther kind," roared Horn. "You ar' a chief, that's what ye ar', an' you have plucked my tail-feathers in ther wu'st sort o' way. I'm goin' ter git down off ther fence an' let you do ther crowin' now, fer you ar' cock of ther camp an' I'm nobody. I don't want no furder proof of et, either. Ef I couldn't hit ye ther way I was peggin' at ye till I got winded, then I couldn't hit ye ef I tried a week, an' so I say I ain't in et. Three yaups fer ther new cock of ther camp, boys!"

Three cheers were given with a will, the late combatants standing with clasped hands the while.

When they had done, the lawyer disengaged his hand and sprung again to the table.

"Citizens of Bowlder Bend," he cried, "j-st low me ter say a few words in my own behalf, ef ye please. An' ye mustn't mind ther roughness of my speech, either, fer that, as I have told ye, is owin' to force o' habit. I don't want ther honor that has been forced 'pon me. I didn't come hyer fer no sech purpose as that. I want this generous gentleman to keep his position as cock of ther camp, as he is styled, for I am no fighter, an' ef a bad man should come hyer lookin' fer fight, I wouldn't feel like goin' down to 'commodate him. My grip is on ther law, an' et is *that* I kin make best showin' fer my side. Ef you will allow me to bang out my shingle hyer, that will be honor enough."

"You ar' welcome ter do that, sure ye ar'!"

"That is enough, good friends. You, Mr. Horn, put on your laurels again an' wear 'em, jest as ef nothin' had happened. You 'tend ter ther fistic honors of ther camp, an' I'll 'tend to ther legal. An' now, citizens, I'll tell ye what I am goin' ter try ter do. I'm goin' ter take ther case of that young man ye came so near to hangin' hyer a little while ago, an' I'm goin' ter see ef he can't be proved innocent of ther crime with which he is charged. I tell you I'm a tall hustler on a criminal case, and nothin' pleases me so well as ter be on ther defense in a difficult one. I tell you I jest burnish up my weapons an' sail in a way to 'stonish ye. An' that is what I'm goin' ter do hyer, ef I kin get ther job."

The crowd had for the time being forgotten all about their prisoner and the lynching they had been about performing.

The mayor had by this time lodged him safely in jail, and after posting a sufficient guard around the building, was now back again with the crowd.

"Do you take it for granted that he is innocent, sir?" the mayor asked.

"That's what I don't, boss; but even ef I did, I would fight fer him jest ther same. That is my main holt, an' I won't begin ter say how many guilty necks I have saved from ther rope."

"But, if the prisoner is guilty in this instance, we don't want him saved," spoke up Manager Roefling. "After the shameful way in which he has lied about poor Harry, I have my doubts about his innocence, and if he is guilty, I want to see him suffer for his crime."

"And it certainly looks as though he is guilty," added Sport Gobert. "I am almost sorry I had to take a hand in it, for fear there may be a mistake, but I am sure you must agree with me that it was right for me to make the arrest."

"Nothing was plainer," agreed the manager. "You did perfectly right, and if he is proved guilty the reward shall be yours."

"My dear sir, I hope you do not imagine I thought of the reward! Not so; and even if Mr. Morton is convicted I will not accept it. No, sir! I was not actuated by hope of winning that."

"Pardon me, I hadn't a thought of the kind, Mr. Gobert. But, if you have arrested the right man the money will be yours, all the same. It looks dark for the boy. He was here that night, when he said he was at home, and the story he has told about Harry is not to be credited for a moment."

"Nevertheless, I am glad my citizens came to their senses in time to save his life," said the mayor. "Boys, I am proud of you. I really feared you would hang the man untried, but I am glad your better judgment came to the rescue, and that you did not put such a stain upon our fair camp. I know I can trust you, now. That prisoner must have your protection tonight, and to-morrow he will be tried."

The mayor spoke thus in order to rub the mob's fur the right way, as he expressed it privately, later on, and it was a success.

Three cheers were offered for the mayor, and they were given with a will.

And followed then cheer after cheer, first for one thing and then for another, till the throats of the multitude were hoarse.

Then it was that Lawyer Jobson struck the right key by proposing that one and all should seek some popular resort, to "irrigate" at his expense. And that put the final seal of popularity upon him.

The Old Rye was proposed as the place, and thither the crowd adjourned.

"Py dunder!" cried Kris Karples, the proprietor, as the crowd surged in, "I vas dink what der lightning peen struck mine blaces, maybe. Der vas not a plamed man left but meinselv. I hafe lose more as dwenty dollars by dot biece foolishness."

This last was a confession that brought a laugh from the throng, and the lawyer hastened to say:

"Never mind, old hoss, jest take this hyer money and set 'em up for the hull crowd. Never mind the change, if any; give that to the poor when the hat is passed around. Trip right up, now, fellers, and put somethin' in yer stomachs that will do ye more harm than good, every time."

"Dot vas von vay ter recommend mine blaces, anyhow," cried the Teuton, with an injured air. "Der poys know l keeps nodings but der best. But, dot vas all right, und it is all der same in Dutch anyhow, maybe."

He had examined the money, and finding it all right, turned to serve his customers, a broad smile upon his broader face.

The lawyer had stepped back to allow the

crowd full range at the bar, and he was not missed.

Strange to say, he was not seen again, for when they came to look for him he was gone. Where he had disappeared to, so suddenly, was a question.

"Where the deuce do you suppose the fellow went to?" wondered Barlow Gobert, talking with the mayor, the mine-manager, and others, at the hotel, later on. "What do you make of it all?"

"I don't know," answered the mayor. "But, maybe it means nothing; he may have been tired, and took the chance to steal away to go to bed."

"But, where does he put up?" questioned the manager. "We know he is not here at the Queen Anne."

While they were talking thus the lawyer walked in.

"Where have you been?" the mayor asked.

"Ha! did ye miss me, then? I thought maybe no one would think about me when out of sight."

"You have made yourself too prominent not to be missed, and so soon after your exploit, too. We thought you had gone to bed somewhere."

"No, not yet, though that is ther next thing in order. I have dropped in to see ef they would have me hyer. I'm not over beautiful an' tidy in my 'pearance, I know."

"I guess they will take you in," the mayor assured. "But, that does not answer the question I asked."

"Whar I had been?"

"Yes. You disappeared so suddenly that it has aroused somewhat of curiosity, you see."

"Is that so? Well, et ain't nothin' fer folks ter git curious about, fer they might'a known what I had uppermost in mind at ther time."

"And what was that?"

"Why, ther comin' trial of that young man, of course."

"And you have been to talk with him?"

"Sure enough."

"And you got in?"

"You bet!"

"How?"

"Why, I told 'em I had been crowned lawyer larriat of ther camp, or words to that effect, and that I had the right to enter and talk with my client, and a lot more to ther same effect, an' they let me in."

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked the mine-manager.

"Why, he's guilty, thar ain't no question about that," Mr. Jobson declared. "But, all ther same, I am goin' ter take ther case and prove him innocent, ef it can be done. I have made black white before, and maybe I can do it again. Anyhow, the man has ther right to clear himself ef he can, an' he's engaged me to fight ther battle."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CASE AGAINST MORTON.

NEXT morning found the camp in a state of excitement.

Opinion was divided regarding the innocence or guilt of Cyrus Morton, and the advocates of both sides were earnest.

On the one hand all the women of the camp declared their belief in his innocence, in spite of all appearances, and they had their supporters.

Perhaps the stand taken by Tessie Dunn on the previous night had had much to do with it, for Tessie was a general favorite with everybody, and her declaration of love for the young man would naturally carry a long way.

But, on the other hand, the open avowal of the self-styled lawyer that he believed his client guilty, was wondered at, and it strengthened the belief of those who had been against the prisoner from the first. It imbibed the mine-manager against him all the more.

All work in the mines was forgotten.

The town was idle, and as the time for the hearing came, the crowd thronged the street.

As has been said before, there was not a building anywhere in the camp that would accommodate the crowd, so the hearing had to be held again in the open air, as on the previous night.

A platform had been put up in the middle of the street, in front of the Queen Anne Hotel, large enough to hold prisoner, judge, jury and all, and to this platform, at the appointed hour, the prisoner was brought by a constable in due form.

Mayor Dunn was a justice, and he had his jury all ready for the case, and all took their places.

On the piazza of the hotel were ladies, prominent among them being Mrs. Ranchards and her daughter, and Tessie Dunn.

The last man to step upon the platform was the lawyer of the big coat, Mr. Hobson Jobson, as he had stated his name to be, peculiar as it was.

The prisoner looked pale and haggard, but did not exhibit any of the great nervousness he had shown on the previous night. He sat in his place with an air of simple resignation.

"Are we all here?" asked Mr. Jobson, as he looked around. "If we are, the case may as well be hustled along. By the way, gentlemen of the jury, I will strive to bring myself to use proper language, but if, in the heat of argument, I lapse into the vernacular, don't mind that. Force of habit, you know."

He bowed and sat down.

"We are here," spoke the justice, then, "for the purpose of hearing the case against this prisoner, Mr. Cyrus Morton, charged with having some knowledge concerning the murder of Harry Deerland. Let the charge be now made, and the defense shown."

Now, Bowlder Bend was too large a place not to possess some gentlemen of the legal fraternity, such as they were, and one among these was a man named Ridgley Pym.

He was a very self-important personage, and from the first appearance of Mr. Jobson he had booted at the idea that he could be anything other than a pretending shyster of the worst sort.

Mr. Pym held some position that made him something of the manner of a public prosecutor, and it had fallen to him to conduct the case against the prisoner.

He got up with a good deal of dignity, and after proper hesitation, said:

"Much as it pains me, personally, to perform the duty that falls upon me, yet I recognize that self must be put down and duty made paramount to every other consideration in a matter of this kind. Ahem!"

Mr. Jobson was looking at him with wonder depicted upon his countenance.

"Duty before everything," the prosecutor repeated. "So, in this case, person is dead and only Duty lives. Ahem!"

He looked around to note the effect of his words.

"That's about straight, I take et, Mr. Duty," observed Mr. Jobson. "Push right ahead, now, and git thar."

"Sir! your speech is a disgrace to the bar!"

"Et will pass all ther same."

"And my name is not Duty, either, sir. My name is Pym."

"Hold on, now, 'fore ye git tangled. Didn't you say Pym was dead, and only Duty was alive."

"Figuratively, sir, figuratively."

"That's what I mean, too. Figuratively, you are dead; and I don't talk to dead men. Come, now, Mr. Duty, hustle!"

The crowd roared, and the judge rapped for order.

"Were it not that duty compels," Mr. Pym declared, "I would not be seen here on even footin' with this person—"

"Better have a care, Pymsey," called out Hiram Horn. "Ther fu'st ye know ye may git a good deal higher than on even footin' wi' him."

"With this person, I insist," the prosecutor went on, regardlessly. "It is only from a sense of duty that I am here, under such circumstances, I assure you, gentlemen of the jury."

"Wull, git ter biz," one jurymen urged.

"Yes, at once. The prisoner at the bar, Mr. Cyrus Morton, has been arrested as you have been told, on the charge of knowing something about the murder of Harry Deerland. A stronger charge could have been made, and well sustained, too, I think, but I take it as I find it. Ahem!"

"The murder of Harry Deerland is well known to all of you. No need to say anything about the particulars of that sad affair. The jury decided that he had come to his death at the hand of some person, to the jury unknown, who had stabbed him with a knife while he slept. That was all, and no suspicion attached to any person at that time.

"Some time after the sad affair, the dead man's uncle, Mr. Roefling, sent to California for this young man, the prisoner at the bar, to come out and take Harry's place. He came promptly. He had not heard of Harry's death till he got here. Then it was a shock to him, he pretended. He had been in California at the time it happened, of course, and as Mr. Roefling did not mention it in his letter to him, he could know nothing about it till his arrival here, of course. To be sure not.

"Well, he came here, the prisoner at the bar,

and great was his grief. It was not so great, however, as to prevent him from taking the position the murdered man had held. Oh, no. Nor was it so great that he could make any objections to a proposal Mr. Roefling mentioned to him as a request Harry had made. That was, that if anything happened to Harry, this young man, Cyrus Morton, was to be taken into his place by the uncle, and dealt with the same as Harry himself would have been dealt with, and this for their friendship's sake. Ahem!"

"Done, Mister Duty?" asked the lawyer of the big coat.

"Sir, I will inform you when I am done."

"All right, rattle on, then!"

Mr. Pymm turned his back upon him broadly and with dignity.

"It now appears, however, gentlemen of the jury," he resumed, "that the prisoner at the bar was not in California at the time of the murder at all, but that he was right here at Bowlder Bend on that very night! A hint of this was given to our esteemed fellow-citizen Mr. Gobert, and when he mentioned it to the prisoner he showed such marked signs of confusion and dismay that he was promptly arrested, upon suspicion. It was right! The indignation of our citizens last night well spoke the sentiment of the public. In the sight of all men, the prisoner at the bar stands convicted of the murder of Harry Deerland."

Some one raised a cheer, and a goodly portion of the crowd joined in giving it.

"And is not all the proof against him?" the important lawyer demanded. "What has he to say in his own behalf? Did not his dismay and utter cowardice last night prove the guilt that was on his mind? And, what explanation did he make? I will tell you. In the first place, he had told a blank and positive lie, declaring he was in California when the deed was done. When pushed to the wall, he admitted that he was here on that very night. What reliance is to be placed upon the word of such a man as that? Then, worst of all, he has tried to damage the character of his victim by telling a most preposterous lie. Who will believe that Harry Deerland sent for him and made a proposition to him that together they should rob the safe of the company? No one will believe it!"

Another cheer, louder than the first, was given, and some uttered threats were heard here and there against the prisoner.

"Let me know when you ar' done, please," requested Mr. Jobson, meekly.

"Yes, I will inform you when I have finished, sir," Mr. Pymm snapped. "And then if you can make anything out of the case you are welcome to do so. That, gentlemen of the jury, is the character of the prisoner at the bar. A fellow who could come here and take the position of the man he had killed; who could tell such a damnable lie to blacken his character; who could worm himself into the affections of his victim's uncle; who—"

Loud hissing on the part of the crowd on the piazza caused him to pause and look in that direction.

"Sir," cried Tessie Dunn, standing and pointing the finger of scorn at the lawyer, "you have not proved the guilt of the prisoner yet. For my part, knowing what I do about the character of Mr. Deerland, I believe Mr. Morton's story is true."

The prisoner looked toward her with a look of thankfulness in his eyes.

"A biased opinion, gentlemen of the jury," the lawyer waived. "The opinion of this young woman, blindly in love with the rascal, must have no weight in your minds. Mayor Dunn, be glad that the character of the prisoner has been shown up before he could entwine his serpentine folds around the affections of your fair child, and so drag her and you down to disgrace with him. Here he is a murderer in the sight of God and men; a villain who could coolly and deliberately stab to the heart his friend, in order that he might gain his position and prospective fortune for himself. What will you do with such a fiend, gentlemen of the 'jury'? See him, coming here that night, armed with a dagger. He knows well enough where to find his victim. He goes there, he gains entrance, he does the deed, he hastens away, he gets back again to California, in order to be there when sent for. Then he comes here, without any knowledge of the matter, and his heart is wrung when he learns of the death of—"

The prisoner sprung to his feet, white to the lips, crying:

"You infernal—you contemptible, lying knave! Were I free, I would knock you off this platform, as you deserve!"

The ladies on the piazza clapped their hands,

and a cheer went up from them. The lawyer had stepped back in haste to the edge of the platform, and stepping a few inches too far, he toppled and went over.

At that the crowd broke into a laugh at his expense, and the force of his argument against the prisoner was broken, to a great extent. And the lawyer of the big coat, getting up and staring around in a ludicrous way for his opponent, set the crowd in a roar.

"Wh—whar is my respected adversary?" Mr. Jobson inquired. "By ther 'pearance of things he is ther only one that has been carried away by his argument. He has talked himself clear out o' sight, et seems. Ef he is done, your Honor, maybe I kin now be permitted ter toot my little bazoo."

CHAPTER XV.

MAKING A DISCLOSURE.

MR. PYMM had made haste to get himself up out of the dust and dirt, and he also made haste to scramble back upon the platform, very red in the face and very dusty everywhere else.

"That is the case, gentlemen of the jury," he cried, brushing away vigorously at his clothes. "That is the case, and now I leave it with you to decide, as intelligent men, doing your own thinking, whether the prisoner at the bar is guilty or not of this heinous crime."

With a profound bow, then, Mr. Pymm stepped back to give the other side a chance.

"Waal," drawled Mr. Jobson, "ar' ye done at last?"

With a disdainful wave of the hand Mr. Pymm intimated that he was, and that his opponent had the floor.

"That bein' ther case," said the lawyer of the big coat, "we will jest roll up our sleeves, figuratively speakin', and wade in. That is a mighty poor figger, though, as ye will say, fer folks don't wade with their legs, but—I mean, they don't wade with their arms, but with their legs. But, no matter about that.

"Gentlemen of ther case," said the lawyer of the big coat, "we will jest roll up our sleeves, figuratively speakin', and wade in. That is a mighty poor figger, though, as ye will say, fer folks don't wade with their legs, but—I mean, they don't wade with their arms, but with their legs. But, no matter about that.

"Gentlemen of the jury, as I said afore, ye must excuse my manner o' speech. Force of habit an' association have in a manner spoiled me, as et were. Perhaps as I git warmed up,

however, my old-time eloquence will come back to me, and I shall be able to do honor to ther matter I have taken in hand. So much fer that;

and, as Mr. Duty thar expressed et—Ahem!

"Now, as to ther guilt of ther prisoner at ther bar, I have no manner of doubt on that ar' point. All ther same I am hyer to defend him, an' ef I kin make et to appear that he ain't guilty, so much ther better fer him, an' so much ther more honor to me. This is jest ther sort o' case that I like ter git into, whar I kin jest spread myself an' rake up Blackstone from away back and fling et at my opponent in solid chunks that will keep him lively on ther dodge.

"But, ter git right down ter business, now, an' see what we kin make out of a foregone conclusion. Ha! them's good words! I'll get thar, citizens, 'fore I get done; I'll wax eloquent as I git warmed up to et. I'm bound ter save ther neck of that young man from ther rope, much as he undoubtedly deserves ter be hanged, or I'll go out when I git done an' butt out my brains against a bale o' cotton, ef I can find one in ther camp. Et has been made so plain to us that the prisoner did kill Harry Deerland, that nobody kin doubt et: yet all ther same I'm goin' ter try to prove that he didn't do et.

"Now, let me call ther chief witness, Mr. Barlow Gobert."

This call made a little stir, and all eyes were turned upon the sport, who was on the platform.

"Here I am, sir!" he announced, standing up for a moment to show himself.

"All right; please ter walk right out hyer an' take yer seat in ther witness-box, which same will be my chair fer ther present."

The lawyer placed his chair, and the witness stepped forward and took his seat where he could be plainly seen by everybody.

"Now," demanded the lawyer of the big coat, "we want ter know how you found out that Mr. Morton was not in California on the night of the murder, sir?"

"A question I must decline to answer."

"Ye do, hey? What's yer reason fer declin' ter answer?"

"Because to do so would be to betray the confidence of my informant, sir. I would not do that."

"But, that is jest what we want to git at. We want to know who et was that first disclosed ther fact that the prisoner was not at home that night."

"I will not answer."

"Your Honor, I insist upon an answer to my question."

"The question is a proper one," said the mayor, "and one that should be answered."

"Nevertheless, I decline to answer it," the sport coolly refused. "My informant was a person above reproach, and, since the information was true, as we have it admitted by the prisoner himself, I consider the disclosure unnecessary."

"Well, we'll pass it forther moment, but not fer good," said the lawyer. "You can step back, an' now I'll call upon Mr. Benjamin Roefling to testify."

Mr. Roefling took the chair.

"You sent for Mr. Morton, after your nephew had been killed, I am told, sir," the lawyer observed.

"Yes, sir."

"What was his manner, when you first made known to him the fact that his friend had been cruelly murdered, sir?"

"He seemed taken all aback, the hypocrite!" the manager cried. "His acting was so good that even now I can hardly believe he is guilty. But, how can he escape, after the way he has condemned himself?"

"Condemned himself, has he?"

"Yes, doubly. Trying to disgrace the memory of poor Harry was the worst step he could have taken."

"Then it is out of the question that it could have been true!"

"Sir, you insult the memory of that boy!"

"I'm sorry fer that, truly, sir. It seems pretty clear that Morton killed him, but still we'll hold out as long as we can for him. Did the prisoner shed any tears when you told him he was dead?"

"Yes, he did. He broke right down an' cried like a child."

"Poor feller! Sorry, no doubt, that he had killed him. Seems like a dead sure case against him."

Mr. Pymm was rubbing his hands with satisfaction, and was smiling and winking at the mayor and the jury.

"That is all, for the present, Mr. Roefling," the lawyer added. "We want to see jest how black the case is, you know, before we begin ter paint et any."

"Yes, gentlemen of the jury, it is a black case indeed, and it shows the prisoner at the bar to be a heartless wretch, unfit ter breathe ther air enjoyed by honest men. Let's see how heartless he is, really."

"To begin with, Deerland was his friend. They had been chums at school, and on one occasion Deerland had saved Morton's life at the risk of his own. From that time Morton was his devoted friend. After their school days, when they went abroad together, Deerland was stricken down with a dangerous fever, and for nearly a month Morton was by his side night and day, sleepless and tireless."

The lawyer was getting warmed up a little, and his rough manner of speech was being dropped, gradually.

The prisoner had bowed his head upon his hands, and tears were seen dropping between his fingers, while unheard sobs shook his frame.

Mr. Pymm noted this, and called the attention of the jury to it.

"Yes, he weeps," said Lawyer Jobson, "and can you wonder at it? That friend, the only friend he ever had, almost, is cold in death, and he is here a prisoner, accused of having murdered him. What! Cyrus Morton the murderer of the man who had saved his life on one occasion, and to whom he was deeply attached! Perhaps, after all, there is some mistake here, gentlemen of the jury."

"Permit me to call Miss Tessie Dunn to the stand."

The fair daughter of the mayor left the hotel piazza and made her way through the crowd to the platform in the street, where she mounted to the witness chair.

"Miss Dunn," said the lawyer, respectfully, "we desire to know what you can tell us about this matter. A few minutes ago, when my respected antagonist, Mr. Duty, was spouting—"

"Sir!" from Mr. Pymm.

"Spouting, I said, sir," repeated Mr. Jobson. "While he was spouting, miss, you interrupted him, declaring that he had not proven the guilt of the prisoner, and adding that, knowing what you do about the character of Deerland, you believed the prisoner's story. Please tell us what you know."

"I will do so, sir, and gladly. I could have made my statement even stronger than I did, I think. During Mr. Deerland's time here he sought my company a good deal, and I have had opportunities to judge of him more closely than any one else, perhaps. He was a man who was not all good, by any means. His tendency

was to evil, as I positively know. Yet, he was easily influenced, and I have not a doubt that the story told by Mr. Morton is true in every particular."

"There is nothing in that," spoke up Mr. Pym. "That is nothing more than a biased opinion—a mere impression. What we want is fact, sir, *fact!*"

"I have got the floor now, I believe," reminded Mr. Jobson. "Now, miss, you have admitted that Mr. Deerland was much in your company. He was in your company as a lover, I believe."

The girl flushed rosy.

"He tried to win my hand in marriage," she admitted.

"But, you refused him?"

"I did."

"Had he a rival?"

"Yes."

"Who was that rival?"

"Mr. Gobert."

"You favored *him?*"

"I despised him utterly!"

"Then you considered him even less worthy than Deerland?"

"Yes."

The sport's face was flushed, hearing this plain talk regarding himself, and a scowl darkened his brow.

"That is all for the present," said the lawyer, who by this time had won the attention of the whole crowd, and who had now dropped his dialect entirely. "Remain here on the platform, please. I will now call Mrs. Ranchards and her daughter."

This created wonder, for what could they know about the case?

There was a stir on the piazza, and the two ladies, the younger wearing her veil, came down and approached the platform.

When they had mounted, the lawyer turned to the daughter.

"Did you ever see this dagger before?" he asked her, showing the weapon with which the murderer had been done.

"Yes, sir, I have," was the answer.

"Will you please say where?"

"It used to be mine—is mine still, of right," was the firm answer.

Gobert the sport had partly risen from his seat, at this, but settled back again, his face pale.

"How came it to go out of your possession?" the lawyer continued.

"I have reason to believe it was taken from me by my husband, who deserted me some time ago."

"Ha! is that so? Who was your husband, then? We may be coming at this matter, now. If he had this weapon, where was he on the night of that crime?"

"My husband's name was Robert Goldbar," throwing back her veil as she spoke, "and *that man*," pointing straight at Gobert the sport, who had sprung to his feet now, pale to the lips, "is he! You cannot deny it, you miserable wretch!"

CHAPTER XVI.

HONORABLY ACQUITTED.

THE crowd looked on, spellbound, wondering what was coming next, and utterly astounded by the disclosure that had been made.

"Woman, you say what is false!" the accused sport cried. "I never saw you before in my life! I am not a married man—have never been married! You have told a deliberate lie!"

"I have spoken only the truth, Robert Goldbar, and you know it well enough. It was but a slight change you made in your name, from Robert Goldbar to Barlow Gobert. If further proof is needed, let the gentlemen of the jury look at this. I think it will convince them."

As she spoke she drew a paper from her bosom, unfolded it, and handed it to Mayor Dunn.

It was a marriage-certificate, with the pictures of the couple pasted upon it in spaces set apart for them!

At sight of it an oath escaped the accused sport.

"Hal! you recognize it, do you?" cried the woman. "You thought you burned it, you villain, but the paper you destroyed was something else, which you got hold of by mistake in the dark. Do you want further proof, gentlemen, for what I charge?"

"Not a bit!" declared one of the jurymen. "His face is all we want to satisfy us that the corn is on him."

"And if he had this dagger in his possession on that night?" suggested the lawyer.

"Then he's ther murderer!" was the cry.

The sport's hand had been moving toward his

hip, and he was looking at the crowd around as if calculating his chances for escape.

With a sudden spring the lawyer of the big coat was upon him, and he was overcome and handcuffed before he could make a move to defend himself. And in the same moment he was disarmed.

"Who ar' you, lawyer?" was the cry that went up, at that.

For answer the lawyer removed the disguise he had been wearing, and there was—the Frenchman, M. Arnauld!

At the same time, too, Mrs. Ranchards removed a disguise she had on, and stood forth confessed as the professor's wife, the great mind-reader!

Together they bowed to the company.

"What is the meaning of all this?" demanded the mayor, almost taken off his balance by the sudden changes that had been wrought. "Then you were not what you pretended to be at all, but *detectives?*"

"Exactly, sir."

"And Morton is innocent?" cried Mr. Roefling.

"As innocent as you are, sir," the Frenchman assured, speaking without any accent.

"And the guilty one is—"

"You see him here before you. Robert Goldbar is the assassin!"

"It is a lie!" the new prisoner cried. "That is not my name! I never saw the dagger before! I did not do the deed!"

"Ah! but you did do the deed," the detective asserted. "We have such a net around you as you can never break. You and you alone killed Harry Deerland."

"A lie! a lie!"

"Is this *your* cuff and button?"

The detective drew forth a blood-stained cuff as he put the question.

There was no need for the prisoner to answer, for the crowd recognized it at once as one they had seen the sport wear.

"You had this on at the time you did the red deed," the detective went on, "and finding the red stain on it, you threw it where you thought no one would ever discover it."

"No, no, I never did!"

"Pah! we know the truth now! It was the first clue we discovered when we came here as the old couple, a Mr. and Mrs. Hazard, some weeks ago. Perhaps you will remember us."

"Py dunder!" cried Kris Karples, who was in the front of the crowd, "but dot vas vonderful, maype! Mayor, dot aggounds for der vay der peoples could read minds der vay dey did dot nightd, ain'd id? I go aroundt behind der house und kick meinself for a shackass!"

Everybody was amazed at the disclosure just made.

"Then, in the name of wonders," the mayor spoke the question that was on every lip, "*who and what are you, man?*"

With a few swift movements the detective removed further disguise, allowed the expression of his face to assume its natural pose, and lo! there before them stood the Prince of the West, Deadwood Dick Junior!

And the woman, too, removing her disguise at the same time, stood by his side—the beautiful and peerless Kodak Kate, his wife!

At this the prisoner collapsed, and sunk trembling into his chair, guilt plainly written upon his haggard face.

"Then you deceived us—" the mine-manager said, and paused.

"A rather deceptive deal, I would call it," declared the mayor. "It is wonderful!"

"Py dunder!" ejaculated the Teuton proprietor of the Old Rye, "id vas enough to made a man's heart swim, py chiminy id vas! Who vould of dunk it?"

"It was just such a game as we had to play in this case," Deadwood Dick then explained. "We came here immediately, in disguise as the old couple, and quietly looked over the ground. Our suspicion was aroused against Barlow Gobert, but we had to lay a scheme to entrap him fully."

"An' ye have done et!"

"Yes, we have done it, and have the proof for the charge we now make, that he is the murderer, the man who killed Harry Deerland. We picked up all the information we could, and then went away and prepared for further moves. We looked into Gobert's history; discovered his wife, whom he had deeply wronged; and armed ourselves with all the information we could glean.

"Then, as you now know, we came back here as the French couple, and gave our exhibition in Old Rye Saloon. You can clearly see, now, how we were able to read minds as we did,

What I explained when I came here later, in my proper person, which I did to allay any suspicion, you can now understand was only what I knew to be the facts of the matter, the whole thing being something of my inventing, with the aid of my wife.

"At the time of that exhibition, while my wife was blindfolded on the stage, answering questions, I was watching the audience narrowly, and Barlow Gobert in particular. That he was the murderer I then and there made up my mind fully. We had, as I say, previously made such discoveries as enabled us to carry out the game as you have seen it played. And now for the motive: It was a trifling one, but with such a villain it was sufficient. He loved Tessie Dunn, or at any rate he desired her, but, as he believed, Deerland was in his way. Once the book-keeper was removed, he thought, the way would be easy for him to win the mayor's pretty daughter; so he did the horrible deed; but, thank God it was done in vain," and you, my good people, are spared the added crime of hanging a wholly innocent and really excellent young man!"

"Lynch the murderer!" cried the crowd.

"String him higher'n a kite, ther ornery cuss!"

"Give him what we kem near givin' t'other feller last night, darn him!"

"Hold!" ordered Deadwood Dick, putting up his hand in an authoritative manner. "We will have none of that. The law is well able to deal with him."

"But, my nephew!" muttered Mr. Roefling. "If Cyrus is innocent, and Gobert guilty, am I given to understand that Harry really did propose robbing my safe, as Cyrus has stated?"

"Such is the solemn fact; the young man told you only the truth," assured Deadwood Dick, earnestly.

"I would never have believed it of Harry."

"And I would never have told you, Mr. Roefling, had it not been forced from me as it was," spoke up Morton. "You do not know what a burden it has been upon me."

"And you say you led him to change his mind?"

"I did make him promise that he would never attempt such a thing, sir."

"But, what was his object? What did he hope to gain by it? He had all he wanted."

"He had lost at games, sir, and he had the idea in view that if he had plenty of money he could break Gobert and drive him out of the camp, and so stand a better chance for winning Miss Dunn."

"How foolish!" the girl cried. "I had told him plainly I would never wed him, under any circumstances, and I never would."

"Ahem! May I ask," spoke Lawyer Pym, nervously, "what *proof* there is for all this story? What proof that Mr. Morton's story is true, and that Mr. Gobert is guilty. We must have proof *positive*, you know; the law has a right to demand it."

"There is little need to ask that, so far as the guilt of Robert Goldbar is concerned," responded Dick, giving the rascal his right name. "The proof against him is quite sufficient for any court or jury. The bloody cuff; the dagger that was known to have been in his possession; the fact that he was here under false colors; the motive for the deed; and, now, the guilt that is plainly stamped upon his sinister face. It is as good as a confession from his lips. But, friends, I have more proof still, which will be produced at the proper time. For the present there is sufficient to hold him."

"Thar's plenty ter hang him!" cried one man in the crowd; and the excited throng immediately took up the cry, and there were further threats of a lynching.

The presence of such a man as Deadwood Dick, however, was enough to hold those fierce men in check, and no attempt was made to carry out the threats.

"And as for proof that Harry Deerland really did contemplate the robbery of the safe, and that he wanted to drag his friend into it with him, I have discovered all the tools he meant to employ in the job. It was agreed—rather, it was his plan—that he and his friend together should force open the safe and rob it. Then Deerland was to be bound and gagged in his bed, and in the morning would swear that he had been overpowered by half a dozen men."

"The knave!" cried Mr. Roefling, in shame and anger.

"Then, after a time," Dick went on, "he and his accomplice would share the spoils, and suspicion would never attach to them. It was not the first time Morton had kept him from

going astray. I have looked thoroughly into the case, and have found that Harry Deerland was prone to evil, and that more than once Cyrus Morton had held him straight, not only by advice but by threats of exposure. On this occasion, he thought the temptation would be enough to win his friend over, knowing him to be very poor, and so he tempted him; but, Cyrus Morton was proof against the temptation, and refused. He was brave enough and straight enough to do that."

"Three cheers for Cyrus Morton!" suggested Tessie Dunn.

They were given: long, loud and ringing; and the demand was made for his release from custody.

"Yes, I will release him, gladly," said Mayor Dunn. "Cyrus Morton, let me be the first to welcome you back among us as a free and honored man, guiltless of the crime that was charged against you with such infamous baseness!"

CHAPTER XVII.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

FOR a little time then the crowd tried to make up for its conduct of the previous night, by cheering itself hoarse for the innocent young man.

"Yes, he is worthy of all honor," assured Deadwood Dick, when he could again be heard. "In order to keep his friend's secret, he went back to California as covertly as possible, so that no one might know he had been here. When sent for by Mr. Roefling, it was with misgiving that he came, and when he learned the truth concerning Harry Deerland's fate it is no wonder that he was overcome.

"And Robert Goldbar, the knave! deserves the worst the law can give him. He by chance learned that there was some secret preying upon the young man's mind, and not knowing what it was, made a bold bluff accusation against him; and Morton, thinking he must be in possession of some facts, admitted the truth that he had been here on that fatal night. That was enough for Gobert—to call him by that name still. In Morton he had seen that he had even a more formidable rival with pretty Tessie than Deerland had been, and here was the chance to put him also, out of the way. He did not hesitate about using the means.

"Why, he would have allowed this innocent man to hang, that his own crime might be the more perfectly hidden, and that he might have the better chance for winning Miss Dunn, even though he had no right to marry, having a wife already; and his scheme, carried out, would have been this young lady's ruin. I am glad that once again I have been able to insinuate such a villain in his own trap, and bring him to account. Thanks to my wife here, who is the very best helper I ever had in my work, we have been able to make the case a thorough one, and, though it has been a deceptive deal, as the mayor here has styled it, yet it has been a successful one, and I am proud of it."

"Three cheers for Deadwood Dick!"

"Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!"

"And three cheers for Deadwood Dick's wife!"

"Hooray! Hooray! Hoora-a-ay!! Tiger!! Whoop!! Hoora-a-ay!!!"

Such a cheering had never before been heard in Bowlder Bend, and Dick and his proud and happy wife bowed in acknowledgment.

"Py dunder!" shouted Kris Karples, "I vas nefer so broad in all mine life, ain't id? I veel yust like I vant to boller—Yoo-oo-oop! Eferybody gone along ofer mit mine saloon und I sot 'em oop free, I bet you!"

The jolly Teuton was wild in his happy excitement, and the crowd, for the most part, made haste to avail themselves of his generous offer.

The prisoner, Goldbar, was taken to the jail, where he was placed under guard, in order that no chance should be given him to escape, and also that the mob could not get at him to lynch him, for that certainly was the general wish.

His wife, whom he had shamefully misused, robbed and deserted, had no sympathy for him, now detesting and hating him in her righteous vengeance. She was poor, but Deadwood Dick and his noble wife, out of their ample store, gave the really excellent little woman a sufficient sum to begin life anew.

When the case came to trial, Goldbar was readily found guilty, and paid the penalty for his crime with his life.

There was a quiet wedding at Bowlder Bend, the happy couple being Cyrus Morton and Tessie Dunn.

Mayor Dunn and Manager Roefling were happy on that occasion, and proud to admit it.

Both had come to like the young man, for his true worth, and the mine-manager had to acknowledge that he was neither craven nor coward, but a very manly fellow.

Harry had been worthy in many ways, but, as Deadwood Dick had said of him, he was weak and prone to evil, and would probably have come to no good end. He was generous, and loved his friend, but his heart was wrong—or was it his head?

On the occasion of the wedding Kris Karples threw open his saloon to the public, and declared that he had never been so happy in all his life. And the whole camp seemed to be in the same spirit. Deadwood Dick and his wife were there, by special invitation, and the camp did them every honor.

It was a fitting ending for Dick's "deceptive deal," a deal that had ended in a *Royal Flush*, and had rid the camp of a vile character, had punished a crime, and saved an innocent man, and had brought happiness to many.

And, when Dick and his wife took their leave, the cry of the assembled crowd was—"Long live Deadwood Dick! Long live Deadwood Dick's wife!"

So say we all: Long life to both of them!

THE END.

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- 750 Violet Vane, the Vanquished; or, The Lite Struggles.
- 768 Violet Vane's Vision; or, The Fiery Hand of Fate.
- 489 The Diamond Sport; or, The Double Face of Bed Rock.
- 519 Captain Mystery; or, Five in One.
- 581 Dale, Bare the Sport from Denver.
- 587 Old Bombshell, the Ranger Detective.
- 604 Iron Fern, the Man of Fire; or, Among the Vultures.
- 619 The Boy Tramp Detective; or, The Double Grip Witness.
- 641 Dismal Dave's Dandy Pard; or, The Clue to Capt. Claw.
- 651 Bound Boy Frank, the Young Amateur Detective.
- 682 Wild Vulcan, the Lone-Range Rider.
- 714 Old Misery the Man from Missouri.
- 774 Clear-Grit Cal, the Never-Say-Die Detective.
- 789 Sam Sheridan, the Secret Service Special.

BY COL. A. F. HOLT.

- 673 Headlight Harry's Hazard; or, The Lightning Express Detective.
- 691 Headlight Harry's Haul; or, The Railroad Pards.
- 727 Headlight Harry's Sirens; or, Mad Madge.
- 759 Headlight Harry's Heritage.
- 794 Headlight Harry's Hunt; or, The Cache of Gold.
- 899 Black Buckskin; or, The Masked Men of Death Canyon.
- 419 Kenneth, the Knife-King; or, The Doomed Six.
- 485 Little Lightfoot, the Pilot of the Woods.
- 533 The Dandy Sport; or, The King Pin Conspirator.

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- 8 Kansas King; or, The Red Right Hand.
- 19 The Phantom Spy; or, The Pilot of the Prairie.
- 55 Deadly-Eye, the Unknown Scout; or, The Banded Brotherhood.
- 68 Border Robin Hood; or, The Prairie Rover.
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Rosebud Rob, the Sport.

- 80 Rosebud Rob; or, Nugget Ned, the Knight.
- 84 Rosebud Rob on Hand; or, Idyl, the Girl Miner.
- 88 Rosebud Rob's Reappearance; or, Photograph Phil.
- 121 Rosebud Rob's Challenge; or, Cinnamon Chip.

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- 277 Denver Doll, the Detective Queen; or, The Yankee's Surround.
- 281 Denver Doll's Victory; or, Skull and Crossbones.
- 285 Denver Doll's Decoy; or, Little Bill's Bonanza.
- 296 Denver Doll's Drift; or, The Road Queen.

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- 868 Yreka Jim, the Gold-Gatherer; or, The Life Lottery.
- 872 Yreka Jim's Prize; or, The Wolves of Wake-Up.
- 885 Yreka Jim's Joker; or, The Rivals of Red Nose.
- 889 Yreka Jim's New Role; or, Bicycle Ben.
- 894 Yreka Jim of Yuba Dam.

Detective Fritz.

- 209 Fritz, the Bound-Boy Detective; or, Dot Leetle Game.
- 218 Fritz to the Front; or, The Ventiloquist Hunter.

Sierra Sam.

- 244 Sierra Sam, the Frontier Ferret; or, A Sister's Devotion.
- 248 Sierra Sam's Secret; or, The Bloody Footprints.
- 253 Sierra Sam's Pard; or, The Angel of Big Vista.
- 258 Sierra Sam's Seven; or, The Stolen Bride.

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- 884 Kangaroo Kit; or, The Mysterious Miner.
- 889 Kangaroo Kit's Racket; or, The Pride of Played-Out.

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- 96 Watch-Eye, the Detective; or, Arabs and Angels.
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- 145 Captain Ferret, the New York Detective.
- 161 New York Nell, the Boy-Girl Detective.
- 226 The Arab Detective; or, Snoozer, the Boy Sharp.
- 291 Turk, the Boy Ferret.
- 325 Kelley, Hickey & Co., the Detectives of Philadelphia.
- 343 Manhattan Mike, the Bowery Detective.
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- 53 Jim Bludsoe, Jr., the Boy Phenix.
- 61 Buckhorn Bill; or, The Red Rifle Team.
- 92 Canada Chet; or, Old Anaconda in Sitting Bull's Camp.
- 118 Jack Hoyle the Young Speculator.
- 125 Bonanza Bill, Miner; or, Madam Mystery, the Forger.
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- 177 Nobby Nick of Nevada; or, The Sierras Scampa.
- 181 Wild Frank, the Buckskin Bravo; or, Lady Lily's Love.
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- 278 Jumbo Joe, the Boy Patrol; or, The Rival Heirs.
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- 308 Liza Jane, the Girl Miner; or, The Iron-Nerved Sport.
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- 378 Nabob Ned; or, The Secret of Slab City.
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- 524 The Engineer Detective; or, Redlight Ralph's Resolve.
- 548 Mart, the Night Express Detective.
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- 631 Tom-Cat's Terrible Task; or, The Cowboy Detective.
- 638 Tom-Cat's Triumph; or, Black Dan's Great Combine.
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- 568 The Dandy of Dodge; or, Rustling for Millions.
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- 583 Saffron Sol, the Man with a Shadow.
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- 801 Kent Kirby, the High-Kicker from Killbuck.

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- 777 Dick Doom's Destiny; or, The River Blackleg's Terror.
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- 756 Dashing Charlie's Destiny; or, The Renegade's Captive.
- 760 Dashing Charlie's Pawnee Pard.
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- 737 Buck Taylor, the Comanche's Captive.
- 748 Buck Taylor's Boys; or, The Red Riders of the Rio Grande.

Pawnee Bill.

- 560 Pawnee Bill, the Prairie Shadower.
- 713 Pawnee Bill; or, Carl, the Mad Cowboy.
- 719 Pawnee Bill's Pledge; or, The Cowboy's Doom.
- 725 Pawnee Bill; or, Daring Dick.

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- 692 Redfern's Curious Case; or, The Rival Sharps.
- 697 Redfern at Devil's Ranch; or, The Sharp from Texas.
- 702 Redfern's High Hand; or, Blue Jacket.
- 707 Redfern's Last Trail; or, The Red Sombrero Rangers.

Red Ralph.

- 668 Red Ralph's Ruse; or, The Buccaneer Midshipman.

Red Ralph's Bold Game.

- 674 Red Ralph's Bold Game; or, The Wizard Sailor.

- 679 Red Ralph, the Shadower, or, The Freebooter's Legacy.

Butterfly Billy, (Buffalo Bill's Pard.)

- 644 Butterfly Billy's Disguise.

- 650 Butterfly Billy, the Pony Express Rider.

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